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clamor

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No. 14 • May/June 2002

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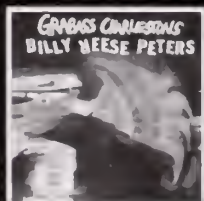
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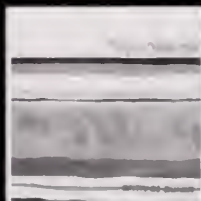
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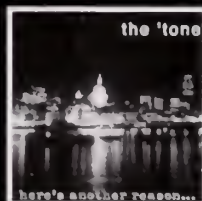
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Hello Everyone!

This issue we're focusing on youth and culture. And while you may think that we are a bit old to be considered "youth," we certainly do not feel like adults. Alright, we're only in our late twenties. Even though Jen, for example, has a full time job, makes car payments, and is, in general, very responsible, she still does not feel like a grown-up. Maybe it's that neither of us have children or own major appliances or have decided to "settle down." Maybe it's that we don't participate in the consumerism and consumption of our parents' generation. Maybe it's that being grown up seems to go hand in hand with compromise, resentment, and we hate to say it — conservatism.

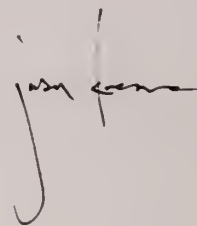
There is power in youth. We fight, every day, to retain ambition and optimism. This helps us to create and maintain a worldview that change can and will happen. When we grow up and gain more experience and knowledge about the world — instead of being overwhelmed, this knowledge should fuel our struggles. Howard Zinn once said that the greatest obstacle to social change is not to convince people that injustice exists, but to convince them that they have the power to change it.

We don't want people to grow up and learn that they can't change the world. We want you to know that you don't have to grow up. This issue we are illustrating ways that youth are empowering themselves and others, such as the interview with Antonino D'Ambrosio about La Lutta New Media Collective, as well as Kari Lydersen's article on how youth are taking advantage of media resources. Chris Strohm and Holly Wren Spaulding report on youth activism from South America, while David Inocencio and Mario Rocha offer poignant perspectives from youth in American prisons. We want these articles, and others throughout the magazine, to help us remember that we don't need to compromise.

In a few months we will feature a cover story on aging and how people cope with these issues as they grow up — or rather, as they age. We will be talking about how individuals maintain their worldview as the culture around us encourages us to sit back, watch TV, and not take any unnecessary risks. Please check our website or contact us for ways that you can participate in future issues.

Thank you, again, for reading CLAMOR. On more than one occasion, we've been taken aback by this magazine we've played a part in creating. We hope you enjoy it. Like all other issues of CLAMOR, this is you.

All the best,



PS. In February, we had a major computer crash. Through hard work and many late nights, we were able to recover or reconstruct almost all of our data. "Almost" is the key word here. If you sent an email, submission, or other correspondence and have not heard back from us, please do get in touch. Also, while we believe that we were able to accurately reconstruct our subscriber files, if there is any problem at all with your subscription, please do not hesitate to let us know. Yes, we have learned our lesson and this will not happen again.

CLAMOR's mission is to provide a media outlet that reflects the reality of alternative politics and culture in a format that is accessible to people from a variety of backgrounds. CLAMOR exists to fill the voids left by mainstream media. We recognize and celebrate the fact that each of us can and should participate in media, politics, and culture. We publish writing and art that exemplifies the value we place on autonomy, creativity, exploration, and cooperation. CLAMOR is an advocate of progressive social change through active creation of political and cultural alternatives.



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Anon, plus a trial of Argentina rephotographed by
Andrew Stern (see article on p. 11)



Dear Clamor

I'm writing in reference to the piece from your March/April 2002 issue, "Middle Class Dominance and the Negation of Class Struggle," in which the author charges our collective with fetishizing poverty.

We consider the author a comrade in the anti-capitalist struggle, and we believe that a diversity of tactics is essential to the success of this struggle; so what I hope to do here is to help us all understand the particular tactics we are applying and why we have chosen them.

The misunderstanding here is not surprising: after all, the back of a book we've published does read "Poverty. Unemployment. Homelessness. If you're not having fun, you're not doing it right." The statement is not directed, as the writer assumes, at poor, unemployed, or homeless people. The author claims that all one needs to do "is read this quote to understand that we are Social Darwinists," but you know what they say about judging a book by its cover . . . in fact, we despise that kind of thinking and know, many of us know all too goddamn well, how horrible living in poverty can be.

The author of the critique states at the beginning that middle class values and standards are destructive and must be combatted within the anarchist resistance as well as without — and we agree. It is crucial that our struggle not only be against the current conditions of capitalism, but also against the value system on which it is based: the fetishization of power, status, material wealth. We don't just fight hierarchy and capitalism because we're angry that we are not the ones at the top.

It's been pointed out before that the capitalist system relies on the visibility of its greatest victims — the homeless — to keep everyone else in line. Just as amassing wealth is held up as the most worthwhile goal, material poverty is represented as the most insufferable fate. Happiness is supposedly impossible without the kind of wealth the middle class flaunts. To the extent that it is believed, this myth keeps the members of all exploited classes struggling against each other rather than our oppressors, and keeps us afraid of taking the risks we need to for effective resistance to be possible. To create and share another kind of values, a more realistic one which emphasizes the necessity of freedom and community for human happiness, is an integral part of winning and thus ending the class war.

We put that provocative quote on the back of that book in an effort to challenge the propaganda of capitalist values. The *average person* is supposed to

know that material poverty equals misery. It is an absurd, ridiculous statement. Our intention was to shock people — not activists, who already are working out their own values, but others who accept the assumptions of the status quo — and encourage them to think about these assumptions.

Fetishizing poverty and lack of social status is indeed a form of middle class rebellion — when one wants to rebel but has not yet developed one's own values, one simply inverts the values of authority. Of course simply removing oneself from the cycle of consumption and wage labor does nothing to change the system. We agree absolutely with the author of the critique when he argues that theft and dumpstering is a *neutral* action, one that may help the individual survive but does nothing, alone, to overthrow capitalism. At the same time, showing that happiness is possible outside the consumer dream can be a revolutionary action, as I hope I've shown.

Also, dumpstering and other alternative means of surviving can help individuals from certain demographics (young people without children or health problems, for example) to build lives in which real acts of resistance are possible. Anyone who has been involved in direct actions at demonstrations in the last couple years knows that some of the ones who have worked hardest to make these effective have had the time and mobility to do this thanks to trainhopping, dumpstering, and theft. The means of making revolution aren't going to be offered at any price we can afford to pay, as one of those old bearded anarchists once said. "We need to stop wasting our time here," the author of the critique writes about dumpstering and other decidedly unsustainable survival tactics — but that's exactly what many of us have been trying to do: limit our consumption needs, so we can work less and have more time to focus on our communities and our struggle. The masses aren't revolting already today because most people simply don't have time left over from providing for themselves to work towards this; so whenever some of us can seize some of that time, by sustainable or unsustainable means, we should — remembering, of course, that the crucial thing is that we then invest it in creating community capital, not just enjoying the vacation. When we spread information about dumpstering, shoplifting, squatting, and so on, it is not because we think anyone *has* to do such things to be revolutionary — that would be moronic — but because we know they can be useful for some of us in this struggle.

It's important to remember that what is effective

revolutionary propaganda for one person may be meaningless or even insulting to another. Please remember that we are your comrades and are doing our damndest to help fight the class war, even when we take a different approach than you do.

In solidarity,
The CrimethInc. Workers' Collective
Atlanta, GA

Clamor,

I love your magazine! It's great to see how far you've come since you started up. Thanks to you, we now have more access to accurate alternative media.

I have a few comments I'd like to make about the article, "Small Boobs" by Diana Fox (Jan/Feb 2002). At 17, Diana proves to be a very honest and good writer, offering a necessary youth perspective on the issue of body image. However, I have a problem with her arguments for how breast implants might be considered "superficial."

I had always thought getting plastic surgery was, well, plastic, and pathetic. I think it's sad to see women and men modify their bodies for the sake of attaining a certain beauty standard. Recently, one of my best friends had her boobs enlarged. She's so beautiful to begin with, has never had problems getting dates or meeting people, and is generally one of the coolest ladies in my life. Unfortunately, since childhood her family and relatives have criticized her for her looks, pointing out what they perceive as inadequacies, and creating a future of repetitious mirror checks, hair-fixated gestures during conversations, and endless purchases of beauty products.

My friend didn't want to tell me until right before she got them done because she knew I would give my radical view: the fact that nobody should manipulate themselves based on what society & culture, advertising & media, or friends & family tell them to do. A woman, or anyone, should appreciate who they are from the heart rather than criticizing the exterior, thereby destroying the emotional interior; AND my feminist view: she also knew I would argue how oppressive beauty culture is on women, and that I also would assume she was making a fucked up and flaky decision in order to get more men in the sack.

I learned she had been researching the surgery for nearly 5 years, went to numerous doctors, talked to other women — considering every possible element related to her decision. She admitted (once again) that she was very aware of her body image hang-ups, and soon I realized just how sad this all was — she was not getting implants to get more guys, or to be more attractive than others — she wanted implants because she wanted to finally have complete confidence in herself, something she had always been deprived of. So her solution was to get bigger boobs. This would make her “feel normal.”

It's sad that society — and family — brings people to these points in their lives. And why? Leave it up to marketing, for one, because “we ARE consumed by consumerism,” as Diana mentioned. There are those who believe everything, and there are those who won't let mainstream bullshit culture intimidate, manipulate, or modify them into a false reality.

My friend has big boobs now. They look great, like firm rocket ships or torpedos, but I can't help but wonder what will happen to them and her over the next 30 years. Will this just lead to more plastic surgery? Will other issues resurface or develop? I've never seen her more confident, and although she has reached HER sense of perfection, it hasn't made her into a shallow person.

While all of this was developing, a roommate brought up a great point. She asked me: “Why are you having trouble supporting your friend's decision to get bigger boobs if you have tattoos, get pierced, and support transgendered rights and sex changes?” I hadn't thought of it that way before. I had always put stuff like boob jobs, liposuction, face lifts, stomach stapling, etc into category A, then tattooing, piercing, branding, scarification, etc into category B, and sex change operations into category C. People have different reasons for manipulating their body, but isn't it just that? If I get tattoos, I have some of the same reasons for doing it that someone could have with getting their breasts altered. I want a different look. I am changing myself to look a certain, personally satisfying way. Just like friends who have or are planning to go through a sex change, don't they just want to feel more like themselves? (Sure.) To have more security with their own body? (Uh, yep.) This is such a long and intricate topic to address, but personally I HAVE to support my friend's boob job because I get tattoos and defend trans rights. Hell, I don't even like boobies all that much!

XOXO,
Andy Rath
Boston, MA
queerwrites@hotmail.com

Hello Jen/Jason,

While I've been impressed with Clamor since I started reading it a few months ago, the March/April 2002 issue was far beyond what I'd come to expect. As a middle class white male, it spoke to me on many levels and definitely made me think twice about a lot of important politics within the activist community and in activist outreach. While I didn't agree with everything, I thought that the articles were really dead-on in addressing problems that many people involved with social change aren't dealing with (namely racism,

middle-class dominance, inaccessibility, diversity of tactics, etc.).

Also, you do a great job in walking the line between pragmatism and idealism. Lots of anarchist publications seem to write about anarchy as though it were too extreme and marginal to ever catch on doom themselves to obscurity. Other anarchist publications are so sure of themselves that they write about anarchy in a way that would make you think that every man, woman, and child was chomping at the bit for revolution. Clamor, on the other hand, is much more clear and realistic. Things look bad, but we aren't fighting because the world is hopeless; we are fighting to win. Keep up the level of quality in the March/April issue, keep pushing the envelope.

Peace,
Chris Pollina

Dear Clamor,

I found Thomas Washington's article “Expatriot Gore” (Jan/Feb 2002) condescending and disappointingly unoriginal. I read the article waiting to come across some unique insight or criticism of American culture that never came. Instead, I was treated to trite complaints about a child kicking the back of his seat and a hypocritical criticism of Burger King in which the author disdains the fast food giant and notes “the smell of burning flesh” while patronizing the restaurant (and eating a chicken sandwich!). I am sympathetic with Mr. Washington and I too have problems with the crass commercialism that is American culture. But I would have liked to have seen a little more original criticism and a lot less recycled complaints about fast food and hotel chains.

Sincerely,
Ariana Vigil
Ithaca, NY

Dear Clamor Readers,

During the week of June 13 – 18 2002 in Madison, WI; there will be an event that will strike a match of resistance in America. This flame of resistance will burn for all the atrocities that have been committed inside the 50 states and abroad by the machine we call the United States. At the controls of this machine have been the politicians and corporate criminals that seek to oppress and destroy everything in its path. We have begun to dismantle parts of the global machines — the WTO, IMF, World Banks, G8; but we have NOT faced the most deadly machine, YET.

We will face this machine during the conference of the—70th Annual US Conference of Mayors, June 14 – 18 in Madison. We hope to employ some of the tactics that have worked against global empire, such as mass demonstrations, direct action, and creative resistance, but we will need the support and action of many to accomplish this feat. So here is what we need:

1. **WE NEED FOLKS FROM ALL ACROSS THE US TO JOIN US** —If you are traveling to the G8 then plan to come to Madison first. If you are attending the North American Anarchist Conference then come here the following week. If you are a student then plan a tour of all three!
2. **SPREAD THE WORD** We will work hard to make this a successful occasion, but we need the power of many

to pull this off. Visit our website for outreach information — www.resist-the-mayors.org. Volunteer to be a coordinator of a travel hub from your bioregion or area.

3. **LET US KNOW THAT YOU ARE COMING** —We will have plenty of space (churches, coops, squats, camping, etc.) for many folks. We will try to provide as much food as we can to all in attendance.

See you here,
CPR — Creative Peoples Resistance
www.resist-the-mayors.org
info@resist-the-mayors.org
(608) 262- 9036

Dear Clamor and Readers:

I am putting together a zine on the prison system. I am looking for stories and artwork from prisoners about their experiences in the prison system. I am also looking for contributions from death penalty activists, prisoner support groups, former prisoners, etc.

Thanks,
Stu Love
240 E Kline Ave
Lansford, PA 18232

Hello Clamor!

I am part of a group in Harrisonburg, Virginia that is working to start a Civic Media Center and Infoshop. The project is one of several projects currently running out of a storefront in the downtown area, which also includes Food Not Bombs and a group working on a food co-op.

We are currently trying to obtain resources for the project. We are interested in receiving books, videos, magazines, newsletters, zines, flyers, etc. If you have new or old resources that you could donate, we would welcome anything you could give. We are also interested in hearing from other organizations that are working on similar projects.

Thanks!
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Set Out



in memoriam:

by Tennessee Jones

Sera Bilezikyan

February 22, 1978 - January 12, 2002

"I want to be in awe of things larger than all of us; sometimes I think true love makes us more; wanting it so bad makes us nothing."

There is a small stretch on the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway that makes my heart climb up in my throat. As the Expressway arches up towards the mainland, a graveyard that stretches on and on for a mile or so becomes visible. The stones are many different shapes and sizes — wide blocks, tall spheres, angels and lambs, some streaked with black age, some beaming white, some culled from the ground gray. Beyond the graveyard, across the East River, the indomitable sky line of Manhattan sticks up like a pall, the Empire State Building a thin strip of gray history, the twin holes of the World Trade Center palpable. Sera and I used to say to each other how the whole blue and gray colossus of Manhattan, awful and wonderful, could almost make us believe in god again. From that holy spot on the Expressway, the graves are almost as tall as the city of New York, a white marble cross competing with the jagged specter of the city, a stark reminder of the inexorable truth that plagues our lives.

I was seventeen when I initially met Sera, and through letters, phone calls, and finally in person, I was awed by the kinetic force of her personality. She was a small fireball, spitting staccato stories about her old stomping ground in New York. The words flew out like spent gun shells and landed at my feet. I picked them up and put them in my breast pocket, close to my heart, to feel their warmth and power. As we hitchhiked across the south one summer, picking our way through the raised graves in New Orleans, I realized that her implacable energy could be enough to pave the way for me to understand the central conundrum of living. As we stalked through the graves, touching flaking paint, the heavy cloying smell in our noses, I was keenly aware of death, and embracing history, I felt fiercely alive.—

As we traveled, I noticed that people were often attracted to that energy. They saw a fire in her, even though they couldn't name it. She turned that light outwards like a beacon, using the conduits of writing, activism, and simple interactions with others to attempt to better herself and the world.

With her death we can only guess at what the world of literature has lost. Though she gave us numerous zines, essays, and articles, the vast body of her talent was still untapped. Her writing, heavily influenced by William Faulkner, played with time and perceptions of reality. Sera's stories often defied linear conventions of storytelling, combining words and events in such a way that she did not just tell the story of a day or an event, but of a mood, a feeling, an imagined epoch.

It was a surprise, the way her writing not only wound around reality, but pulled things out of it that you had not considered, little curling slivers of understanding and insight that created new worlds beyond the broken old typewriters and coffee stains that made literal appearances in her stories.

One of the most valuable things her writing did was talk about anti-authoritarian lifestyles in a way that gave them credence. She connected hitchhiking, anarchism, and dumpster-diving to the larger sphere of human experience. It is nearly impossible to speak of a subculture without it seeming microcosmic and unimportant, even though counter-sections of the population are often where the most exciting and important cultural changes are occurring. Sera managed to make these distinctions, connecting political causes and unknown bands to the universal emotions of joy, love, loss, and fear that run across all sections of humanity.

When someone amazing dies young, the only way to make sense of the death is to blow up their experience, to make it infinitely large, large enough to encompass and mean something to those still living, even those who never knew her. Sera's letters to me revolved around a central theme: striking out against the darkness that exists in mankind. It takes an amazing resolve to do this, to fight against the flow of power and tradition that has been established. I believed until the very end that she would find some way to do it, that her voice, the force of her writing, would turn on the floodlights in the vast stadium of America.

If there's no future for the breathing, walking Sera, then what does her death leave us with? A dark place, a bag of bones, a touchstone gone black and disappeared? To let her death mean this would be to deny the truth of what her life meant. Her death is a reminder that struggle is hard, that we must hold each other up, that we have to remind friends of our love for them. Together, we all have the power to bring forth change. Our lives will be hard, but full of beauty. Our lives will be worth dying for.

So, Sera, in death you are tied to the resurrection of our past and our hope for the future. Our first books, our next records, our struggle, more than for anyone else, will be for you.

**"...I do not know how to live without dreams,
without feeling great without being blinded..."**

clamor contributors

Andrew and Alex Anon (p. 20.) live in Portland, OR. When not commuting back and forth to Olympia as members of a band, the Intima, Andrew works in an IWW-organized shelter for street youth, while Alex has joined the crowded ranks of Oregonians on unemployment. They both enjoy riding their bikes around town, growing organic herbs and vegetables, and raising hell whenever and wherever possible. Reach Alex at mechanicsofnothing@hotmail.com, Andrew at android@tao.ca.

Madeleine Baran (p. 62) spends her time writing her zine Tight Pants, riding her bike, and listening to Billy Bragg. She also writes for a number of other zines, including Razorcake, Go Metric, and Now Wave. Email her at cerealcore@hotmail.com.

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Jeff Frank (p. 40) is currently working as a massage therapist in Florida. You can reach him care of Clamor.

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Ryan James (p. 54) is an activist and freelance artist based in Scar-City (east Toronto) Ontario. His efforts focus mainly on anti-racism and prisoner support. Among other projects, he is working on a comic book biography on Mumia Abu-Jamal. He can be reached at ryan_kj@hotmail.com or 647-221-7465.

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Please write to comrade **Rob los Ricos** (p. 17) at: Robert Lee Thaxton #12112716, O.S.P., 2605 State St., Salem, OR 97310. Donations to Rob personally must be sent in the form of money orders only mailed to: Department of Corrections Central Trust, PO Box 14400 Salem, OR 97309.

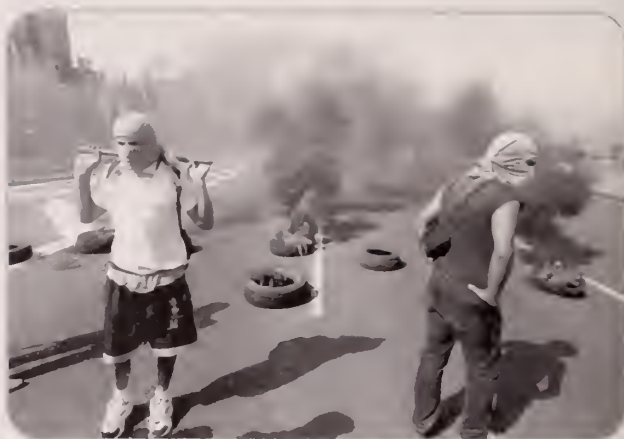
Felizón Vidad (p. 34) has written a couple of columns for Razorcake and is the co-founder of Gorsky Press. Currently, Felizón teaches eighth grade full-time and community college part-time in Brevard County, Florida. She can be reached at felizonvidad@hotmail.com. Her name is not a pseudonym.



ACTIVE YOUTH
in ***SOUTH AMERICA***



andrew stern



andrew stern

A masked teenage female stands in the center of a main bridge leading to downtown Buenos Aires, Argentina, holding a homemade wooden baton as she stares down local police and a line of traffic.

With every part of her being, this teenager from a poor barrio outside Buenos Aires, who won't reveal her name, is doing everything she can to shut down a system she says only works in the interest of a handful of people. Imprinted on her black mask is the simple phrase: No Fear.

On this hot February summer day south of the equator, she is participating in a militant road blockade with about 300 people from other barrios around Buenos Aires. The group has occupied the bridge in order to raise awareness about poverty and unemployment, which is getting worse due to the collapse of Argentina's economy.

Physically, she is separated from youth in other cities and continents who are fighting in their own ways for a better world. But ask any young person who is fighting for justice, and they will tell you their struggles are one.

"We are fighting a system that justifies the use of violence, profits off of violence and uses violence to control populations for profit," said Jai Jinh, an organizer with JustAct in San Francisco, which coordinates global youth campaigns against militarization, racism, and poverty.

Jinh facilitated a workshop at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil in early February on how young people in different countries are organizing against militarization. About 50,000 people

participated in the second annual World Social Forum from January 31 to February 5, with the aim of creating another world that is based on justice and human dignity.

From Canada to Argentina, youth are organizing across borders for justice and peace and against globalization policies that lead to oppression and militarization.

In the United States, youth are building resistance to the war on terrorism and to a political climate that has taken a dramatic shift to the right since the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

"As of September 11, we realized the need to really focus on the war on terrorism and to begin to organize around that in our very different neighborhoods and in our very different communities," said Nicole Burrows, an organizer with Listen Inc. in Washington, DC.

Burrows says her organization focuses on helping young people of color who primarily live in poor communities develop leadership skills and strengthen their community organizations.

"That work is really important on a national level because young people are not always seen as leaders but also because even when it's issues that affect us we're not even seen as constituencies," she said.

In Canada, students and activists are helping to coordinate a global students' strike this November against the Free Trade Area of the Americas, which is a trade liberalization agreement between every country in the Western Hemisphere except Cuba. Students

by Chris Strohm

"We are fighting a system that justifies the use of violence, profits off of violence and uses violence to control populations for profit."

are hoping that workers will join them in the strike.

In Colombia, young people are fighting back against the U.S.-sponsored Plan Colombia, which is funneling military and economic aid to the Colombian government. Youth in Colombia say the aid is being used in part to repress social justice movements and student organizing efforts.

Laura Moisa, an organizer with the Colombian Association of University Students, says Plan Colombia is a military strategy to impose North American imperialism in her country.

She said students in Colombia are coordinating a campaign to expose the U.S.-backed war that is being waged against them and other students in different parts of Latin America. She called on youth throughout the Western Hemisphere to join with Colombians in a common struggle, and to converge in Bogota in May for an international protest against Plan Colombia.

"The youth in Colombia believe that peace will be achieved with social justice for the world and for humanity if we all work together to fight against imperialism and capitalism," she said. "But we say that if imperialism wants a war, the people are ready to wage a war to fight imperialism."

In Argentina, youth are at the forefront of struggles in response to the economic crisis that is gripping the country.

In the poor barrios of Argentina, youth of all ages participate in direct actions with their communities in which they blockade roads to raise public awareness about poverty

and unemployment. During the actions, youth wear masks and carry homemade weapons as they stand on the frontline of a blockade. People who participate in the blockades are called "piqueteros," or picketers.

And within urban universities in Argentina, students are starting to organize with workers and the unemployed in order to build coalitions.

However, regardless of which country they are from, youth say that repression against their organizing efforts has increased since September 11, and they believe things are going to get worse as the U.S. government expands its war on terrorism.

They agree that the bulk of their work needs to be focused on doing public education campaigns to help people understand the connections between globalization, militarization, and oppression.

"Ultimately, we're trying to use the whole issue of the war as a means to build a broader movement and to expand young people's understanding (and specifically young people of color) of the connections between institutional racism, militarism, and poverty," said Dustin Washington, an organizer with Youth Undoing Institutional Racism.

Youth also say they need to have a better understand of the culture in different countries.

During the militarization workshop at the World Social Forum, one person from Brazil said a youth group he works with erupted into cheers when they first heard about the September 11 attacks in the United States. He

said he believes most Brazilians were happy that the attacks occurred, but since have learned that there is a huge difference between the U.S. government and the U.S. people.

"We have to make a distinction between the American government and the American people; they are not the same thing," he said.

The World Social Forum received mixed reviews from those who attended: some people loved it, some people hated it. Maude Prudhomme came to Porto Alegre not for the official forum but to help coordinate organizing strategies between students in North America and South America.

A college student from Quebec, Canada, Prudhomme said she learned that youth in South America are very aware and very weary of economic and cultural imperialism from the United States and Canada.

She said people often have the impression that people in the global South should learn from people in the global North. But she said her experience in Brazil helped her understand that people from northern countries have much to learn from people in southern countries.

For example, she says youth in South America have a much higher level of class consciousness than their counterparts in the North, and are more embedded in their local communities when they do organizing.

"When you stop dominating then you can learn," she said. "When you stop and realize that we have differences, then we all can learn." ★

Buenos Aires Cacerolazo

by Raphihell

From dozens of local asamblea meeting places, under streetlights and prominent corners throughout the city, they gather under the banners which spell out simple things: the neighborhood for which the asamblea speaks, and the time and street corner where they hold their weekly meetings.

From this inconspicuous corner — shouting, singing, and occasionally dancing to the background of drums and tin plates, they will descend toward the center of the city.

The cacerolazo begins everywhere and nowhere, moving as it grows, calling out with its cacophony to the stragglers and the stay-at-homes. At first they are dozens of dispersed groups of 30 or so, preparing to rendezvous with others as they pass by, always banging something, always singing. As each group encounters the next, there is a brief moment of recognition and excitement but the pace never slackens. The trickles of bodies, old and young which lingered on the asamblea corners only moments before, become a stream as they hit the streets, —and a river, over the boulevards.

They sing.

Ya se seinte

Ya se siente

El pueblo en la calle

*Es el nuevo presidente.**

The grand cacerolazo will only finally coalesce in the Plaza de Mayo, in front of the Federal buildings, but it will not stop. It will leave in its wake a hardcopy reminder-broken glass, torn government propaganda posters, spiraling wind tossed swirls of leaflets, and an ever growing political narrative sprayed with paint onto the living walls of the city itself.

As in other cities in Argentina, the international financial institutions which have been clad in hastily installed rolled armor plating soon wear the quickly sprayed curses directed at the IMF, President Duhalde, and the United States— From the political *El Pueblo Unido Avanza Sin Partido* to the vicious *Hijo de Puta*, the shiny steel fortifications become a canvas of narrative sentiment. The most elegant carry the one simple word in the 12 dripping red letters that can tie the culprits together: LADRONES — thieves.

As on every Friday night for the past month, the greater city of Buenos Aires has transformed into a rainsoaked watershed for the frustration of a people who's government has failed them. This is no demonstration, it is a flood, and it will carve a path that is not soon forgotten.



Raphihell

**You can feel it*

You can feel it

the people in the streets

is the new president.

www.indymedia.org

Youth Organizing Outside the World Social Forum

by Holly Wren Spaulding

The Carlo Guiliano Youth Camp in Porto Alegre, Brazil was not just a temporary home for over 10,000 people last week. It was a gathering place for social movements from all over the world. Many of the campers were also delegates to the World Social Forum, which took place on a nearby university campus. However, the majority of those in the camp saw the WSF as reformist, and therefore wanted to stage alternative meetings and workshops in their own, open spaces.

From early morning until late at night, circles of 10 to one hundred bodies could be spotted sitting in circles under trees, around fires, at tables, or under tents throughout the camp. Notices announced opportunities to discuss anything from Plan Columbia to protecting access to free public universities in Brazil. Demonstrations and spontaneous performances taught the origin of Capoeira, a subversive dance form and means of self-defense which emerged among African slaves on Brazilian plantations in the early days of colonization. One could learn about alternative health, origins of hip-hop, samba as resistance,

composting toilets, anarchism and Catholicism, community radio and independent media.

A group of indigenous indians built a traditional fire pit with clay earth and wood poles in the center of the massive camp. Food was cooked in large common pots by groups that had traveled together to Porto Alegre, or it could be purchased from small vendors who offered watermelon slices, vegetarian pizza, coffee, guarana, fresh fruit salad, and an assortment of other, more traditional Brazilian foods.

DJs shared time on the massive PA system with a community radio project, playing music all day and into the night. On many evenings, films were shown on outdoor movie screens, including one about the demonstrations against the G8 in Genoa. The heat was intense, and everything and everyone wore a layer of red dust from the scuffing of many bodies along the well worn paths between the media center, the food tent, and the hundred of encampments marked with colorful banners indicating the many cities and countries in attendance. On days when the temperature reached

into the high 90s, lines formed around the outdoor showers and under the shade of tarpaulins.

For those that felt a frustration with the World Social Forum (and there were many who did, for a variety of reasons), the Youth Camp was a place of hope and creativity. This was where young people, some of them very young, were not just talking about their concerns and critiques, but were actively constructing alternatives, as evidenced by the space itself which supported so many projects and cultures as to be truly overwhelming.

The camp was named in memory of Carlo, a 23-year-old Italian assassinated by police during the G8 protest last July. While the fact of his death indicates the seriousness of things, the camp and what it gave birth to over just a matter of days is also evidence of the spirit of determination and love that is carried by growing numbers of young people today.

As tents were packed and friends exchanged emails and set dates for future gatherings, the energy of those sleepless days and nights set off in a hundred directions... north to Quebec, south to Argentina, and further still to Italy, Spain, and points beyond.

Growing Up Locked-Up

by Mario Rocha
art José "Tricky" Escalante



Daniel's lanky frame emerges from the flock of Mexican inmates gathered on the grass-covered field beside the cement track of the prison yard. His white Nike sneakers, knee-high white socks, long white athletic shorts, and state-issue blue shirt sparkle beneath the bright April sun. Twenty feet away from him, I stand alone beside the rusty pull-up bars. As he glances toward me, a carefree smile surfaces on his ruddy, pimply face. He is now 20, but to me he is still the 14-year-old boy I met back in 1996. A white baseball cap shades his big brown eyes and sharp nose while we shake hands. As we talk, our voices harmonize with the breeze blowing in the yard, blessing this hellish fortress with the sweet Salinas Valley winds.

Our friends Dario and Charlie join us. Dario is short and scrawny with a light complexion; Charlie is tall, dark and husky. They both wear t-shirts, gray sweat-shorts, and white sneakers. Daniel and Charlie start talking about music, while Dario and I discuss writing and books. Soon, our friend Javier strolls into our circle in his unique manner: strutting while bobbing his head to a gangsta rap medley or a *corrido*, a Mexican ballad about the popular narco-trafficking scene in Northern Mexico, a song that only he can hear. He is tall, pale, and stocky, and wears a white slingshot (tank top), blue baggy creased cut-offs, and white Nike Cortez classics. As he rests his elbows against Daniel's shoulder, their facial expressions mirror the peace I feel whenever we get together. At age 22, I am the oldest in the group. But considering all that we have been through, we tend to resist the idea that age can define us. For, though collectively we are the youngest prisoners in the yard, what brings us together is not our common age, but our common struggle as friends serving *'life'* in prison. Indeed, we have known each other since juvy, where we met

about six years ago and became friends during the initial 2-year pre-conviction stage of our incarcerations. As we talk, joke, and laugh, we forget that we are stuck in this maximum-security nightmare...we behave like *boys*.

"Damn, fool, you're looking old," Charlie tells Javier, who responds by rubbing his thickening mustache and fuzzy goatee in deliberate self adoration.

"Yeah, homie, you're getting bigger, too" Dario adds, encouraging Javier to raise his arm and flex a bulging bicep.

"What's that?" Daniel says, pointing at Javier's forearm.

"Oh, this? This is my latest work," Javier casually replies, proudly displaying a six-inch tattoo image of a spear-bearing Aztec warrior standing over a kneeling Spanish conquistador. Then, like kids showing off their newest addition to a comic book collection, Dario reveals an attractive image of the American Indian hero, Geronimo, freshly inked on the back of his arm. In response, Javier reveals a larger India ink collage-in-process on his chest. And as Charlie begins lowering his sock to show us his first tattoo, I seize the perfect opportunity for a laugh: "Hey, Daniel, why don't you show us your tattoo?" Then everybody joins in: "Yeah, fool, show us your bad-ass work! Show us your tattoo!" But Daniel ignores us. He doesn't react the way he usually does, by hurling insults and curses at us in quick-tempered retaliation. Still, we laugh and tease and create a scene. Although none of us truly feel that his old, faded tattoo of the logo for the '60s rock band The Doors is something to laugh at and poke fun of, we continue to give him a hard time because we all know that it really pisses him off. But, for some reason, not anymore. At that moment, I realize that he is not the same 14-year-old boy I met when I was 16. He is growing up. Like the rest of

us, he has accepted and begun to walk the perilous path to maturity.

The truth is, despite our childish conduct within the circle, we are not boys. In fact, when I remember our days at Central Juvenile Hall in Los Angeles—stripped of freedom and disgraced under the orange guise of alleged murderers while attending monthly mock hearings in the adult courts that would eventually send us off to die in prison—I realize that we stopped being kids long ago. Together, we have embraced adulthood. And now, in prison, we are becoming *men*; learning to take pride in our culture and to embrace the historical symbols of other cultures through our struggles.

A sea gull glides over us, and I watch it land in the middle of the yard. My friends do not notice the gray and white bird on the grass. I watch it 'til it flies away, past the concrete prison walls, off into the blue sky. Suddenly, I too fly to where peace confronts reality, lost someplace in my mind, here but not here, listening to my friends chat, but now very conscious of my bleak surroundings. For as I look around me, truth shatters tranquility: I see young men like us being transformed into the "stone cold" criminals that all prisoners are supposed to resemble. I see young people learning to become soldiers for the endless war against themselves, rather than warriors for the causes of justice and freedom. I see youngsters learning to use their hands for hate instead of love, to manufacture weapons to wound and kill their fellow human beings rather than to create instruments to heal and save humanity. Although it is unfortunate that my friends and I have spent our youth behind bars, it is a greater injustice that our experience is no longer unique, for too many kids are growing up locked-up. ★

My Wonderful, Doomed Daughter



Rob los Ricos

Her birth changed my life in ways I couldn't have imagined before I'd met her. She was crying, an angry little cry, while the birth attendants cleaned and weighed her. She sounded lonely over there, separated from her mother for the first time. So I went to her.

The nurses' aides were suctioning amniotic fluids from her tiny nostrils, and I'm certain she was frightened. I cooed her name as I hovered nearby. She turned towards me and held her little arms out. She had recognized my voice – she knew me! I was overwhelmed by a feeling of love, struck in awe by the wondrous beauty that is life. I held my hand out to her and she grabbed my finger.

The look of anger on her face subsided, to be replaced by something else. An accusatory look, as if I'd somehow betrayed her. I'd already accepted that her mother and I would eventually part, but I didn't think a newborn could be so perceptive. I should have known better. There was more to it though; the sadness in her eyes and voice as she looked at me and clutched my finger, wordlessly beseeching, "Why have you done this to me?"

It took her a few weeks to get used to her mother and me. I think she was a bit let down by her parental designees. She adjusted though, and became an absolute pleasure to be around, singing her happy baby song and waving her arms. But I never forgot the expression on her newborn face.

As my relationship with her mother moved towards the inevitable split, I became determined to do whatever it would take to stay involved with her life in a positive way. No matter whatever else might happen to her, I want her to always know she has a father whom loves her. Yet no matter my feelings for her, I now have to live with the realization that I've damned my beautiful, loving daughter to a living hell.

I was arrested during an International Day of Solidarity in opposition to the G-8 Summit, where the representatives of the wealthiest nations in the world get together to decide what they are going to do about the rest of us. On the day of my arrest, we'd been involved in a daylong battle with the police over the control of the city streets. When attacked by a cop in full riot gear, I defended myself. I was sentenced to almost 7 1/2 years in maximum-security prison.

It was easy for the court to single me out for harsh treatment. I was from out-of-town. I think, act, look and smell like a guy who lives in the woods, because I am. I'm Tejano and I'm unashamed of being an anarchist, a

political activist, and writer of anarchist diatribes.

Some of my writings were used against me during the trial. Imagine the prosecutor: "Ladies and Gentleman of the Jury - This man . . ." He spins, and points to me. "This man wants people to" – and I quote—"Discuss, challenge and debate" ideas! Ideas! Well. Not in this country!"

Since my arrest, there have been a lot of similar street battles: the WTO conference in Seattle, the RNC and DNC protests, Mayday, the A16 IMF/WB protests in D.C. and the FBI's determined crackdown on the Earth Liberation Front. Because of my involvement in the activist and anarchist scene for the past 15 years or so, prison bureaucrats have me labeled as a "Gang Member". More accurately, they've labeled me an "STG Member." That stands for Security Threat Group, but my fellow prisoners call me Security Threat Guy – a gang of one. That's pretty funny, until you understand how this affects my daughter.

Here's how it works: government law enforcement agencies need to generate numbers, lists of names for their gang files. For without these ever-increasing lists, agencies might lose funding. So, when my four-year-old daughter comes to visit me, that makes her a "Gang Associate" because she is associating with the known gang member who happens to be her father. Her name is added to the STG lists under "Anarchist."

When she sends me a crayon-scrawled heart with "I Love You" written across it, she has mailed me a gang document – a communication between people known to be affiliated with a gang. And she is upgraded from "Gang Associate" to "Gang Member." Since her mom is on my visiting list, and therefore also a gang list, my daughter is engaging in gang-related activity whenever she is around her mother. This is already enough to have her removed from their home and put in a foster home, or when she's older, sent to juvenile detention centers. She never even has to break a law or even a rule – her everyday home-life is illegal. I realize it's only a matter of time until she, too, ends up incarcerated. She's doomed.

I remember her tiny, newborn hand grasping my finger. I remember the accusing expression on her face and I wonder, How could she have known? ★

Urban Souls

Rev. Osagyefo Uhuru Sekou
Urban Press, 2001

Following behind a bus, I adjust my eyes to read what seems to be typo on the back placard: the word "church" is spelled "C-H-C-H." Beneath the misspelled word are the letters "U" and "R." All together the advert reads: "What's missing in CHCH." The punch line, "UR."

What else is missing in church? For an unbeliever like me that list is too long to mention. But even for the faithful it's still more than bodies packing the pews: How about prophetic vision, how about justice and righteousness, how about compassion, how about looking out for the "least among us"?

In *Urban Souls*, Baptist minister Osagyefo Uhuru Sekou writes, "At no point in American history has religion been so ineffective in its ability to transform the quality of life..."

The Right-wing coup in American religion, specifically Protestant traditions, has scuttled any sense of the aforementioned religious ideals and replaced them with the politics-of-damnation: gays, lesbians, civil liberties groups, and others who dare to question the stomping ground of European patriarchy, are treated to demagoguery and outright hostility. Meanwhile, the radical Left is ambiguous toward religion (as befitting a splintered group) or embraces paganism and other New Age concoctions outside of mainstream viability, a disastrous retreat.

Postmodern anarchist Hakim Bey, aka Peter Lamborn Wilson, rightly argues in his essay *Religion and Revolution* that:

...it seems clear that without religion there will be no radical revolution; the Old Left & the (old) New Left can scarcely fight it alone. The alternative to an alliance now is to watch while Reaction co-opts the force of religion & launches a revolution without us.

The civil rights struggle serves as an example of how the radical Left can pair with religious groups to serve both communities prophetic aims of *eutopia* (a better place). But the Right has high jacked the characterization of Islam on September 11.

Sekou launches a prophetic rebuttal of the religious right's distortions. His primary mission to reach out to, and underneath, the despair of American youth (the Hip-Hop generation) torn asunder by urban poverty and its suburban corollary, "hollowness"—a poverty of meaning born of television-bred parent-child relationships.

For Sekou, profound social alienation is "fluid" across youth experience, regardless of race, sex or class. The result of which is nihilism in urban youth and apocalyptic yearnings in suburban youth. But we all know the practical expressions of both are escalating violence in destructive rituals.

The religious right and middle-of-the-road Christian's response to comfort afflicted youth is generally in the form of unconscious parody. Perhaps that is why Sekou declares that for most urban youth, "There is this fragile white guy on the cross who would not last five minutes in the ghettos of America."

Sekou is not just a liberal clergyman drawing partisan lines. He reminds us that "Liberals apply 'pity' to profound social crises and fail to administer solutions, which lay in providing an environment of meaningful work

and self-help." Sekou's concern is with the "American soul," something that cuts across partisan lines.

Sekou locates three fundamental problems of the "American soul":

- 1.) Hypocritical public policy;
- 2.) Ignorance of truth (historical experience);
- 3.) Violence against body and soul.

I had trouble trusting his categories, because they disappear in to the sometimes-scattered text. (He tells us

that *Urban Souls* is about the American soul only later to question if the American soul even exists?). Nevertheless, he does steer back on course and delves in to what he terms the "Jeffersonian legacy of immorality," hypocrisy toward racial issues, and the idolatry of European patriarchal capitalism.

According to Sekou, the latter is a peculiar form of idolatry—"...the creation of a mythical identity that ultimately no human fits," and "Capital is greater than Christ." European patriarchal capitalism progresses to the point of spectacle, and social relations plunge into the mire of images (See Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* and *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*).

Although Sekou's book is confessional throughout, his most soul-searching chapters are found in the middle, "Who is going to direct the choir?" and "Spiritual Leprosy." In these chapters, Reverend-hood and reverence for love collide in issues of homosexuality, priestly promiscuity, and HIV/AIDS. He denounces the clergy for condemning homosexuality while exhibiting predatory behavior toward women. He also deals squarely with teen sex and HIV/AIDS. His stands are particularly striking being that he's a Baptist minister.

Sekou prescriptions for the ailing urban and suburban soul are set throughout the text, but his most popular writings are bound to be the ones that deal with Hip-Hop. His sympathetic take on Hip-Hop culture shows the role it plays in rooting youth in a critical evaluation of urban experience.

In the following passage, Sekou writes about Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five's "The Message":

A command not to provoke, a pause for the comic, confusion from the tragic, struggle against the odds, childhood innocence, the grace and wrath of God, second class citizenship, hate hymns in the windowpane of the soul, and slum lord housing are the religious raw material for a system of understanding one's role in the world.

In other words, Hip-Hop is political. At the same time he's fully aware, and critical, of the obsession for material wealth and nihilism in Hip-Hop.

Urban Souls is a slim volume, but full of challenging information, not all of which is critique. At times *Urban Souls* can read like a "Chicken Soup for the Radical Soul." Sekou tells stories of "Subversive Love" and adds in his fondness for Otis Redding. "Try a little Tenderness." Maybe that's just we need, as Sekou argues, more "compassionate weapons of existential warfare." This is one.

-D.M. Yankowski



The Neal Pollack Anthology of American Literature: The Collected Writings of Neal Pollack

Neal Pollack
Harper Perennial

The Neal Pollack Anthology of American Literature

Neal Pollack and the Pine Valley Cosmonauts
Bloodshot Records

The Neal Pollack Anthology started as a set of articles in *McSweeney's* Magazine. Pollack wrote a series of articles making fun of bad magazine journalism with pieces drawing on everyone from Norman Mailer and Truman Capote to Ernest Hemingway and Gore Vidal. The result, collected in the first edition of *The Anthology* published by *McSweeney's*, is an irreverent and hilarious send-up of the literary elite.

Pollack imagines himself as a seventy-year-old journalist complete with a host of ex-wives, Brazilian girlfriends and a summer estate in Malta, who is the greatest living American author. "I strained to think of others who could challenge my position, but they were to provincial, too tweedy, or too dead," Pollack explains in his introduction. "No. I towered above the corroded wreckage that is American letters." What follows is a collection of the fictional Pollack's best work throughout the years.

For all its hilarity, the Perennial edition suffers from the same problems as the original. Although the cover boasts 33 percent new material (eight new essays) most of them were added to the front of the book. The last few essays, the longer ones, wear thin and probably would have been better presented had they been spaced a little better throughout the book.

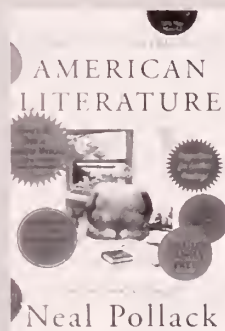
The best of the new essays is undoubtedly "The First Annual New York University Neal Pollack Chair in American Literature Lecture," which tells of Pollack's love affair with literature. "Literature and I met in a pool hall on the Lower East Side," Pollack says. "I complained to literature about the difficulty of being a free-lance magazine writer in New York, about its uncaring world of deadlines and insipid service journalism, and literature understood." But, of course, like any love affair, Pollack and literature would not last. "'I don't need any fucking air,' said literature. 'I need money, and I need drugs.'"

Neal's Bloodshot Records CD, *The Neal Pollack Anthology of American Literature*, features nine spoken word tracks from The Anthology and from Pollack's upcoming *McSweeney's* book, *Poetry and Other Poems*. The album reveals Pollack's desire to be the ultimate in pretentiousness; a rock star.

The problem with the CD is that there's no way it can beat Pollack's live readings. However, the music by the Pine City Cosmonauts proves eclectic, ranging from early-American bluegrass to spicy Cuban salsa. The best reading on the CD, a poem called "I Wipe My Ass With Your Novel," reveals Pollack's comical hatred of successful writers. "Thank you Joyce Carrol for a year's worth of three-ply 'Smell. Can you smell it? It is the smell of my shit on the spine of your novel.'"

And so Neal Pollack continues his joke, which will continue on until all of literature is plagued with bad writing or the venture becomes unprofitable. Either way, Pollack continually reminds us all that you can't spell "literature" without "litter." At least, that is, as long as you misspell literature. Or litter.

- By Danny McCaslin



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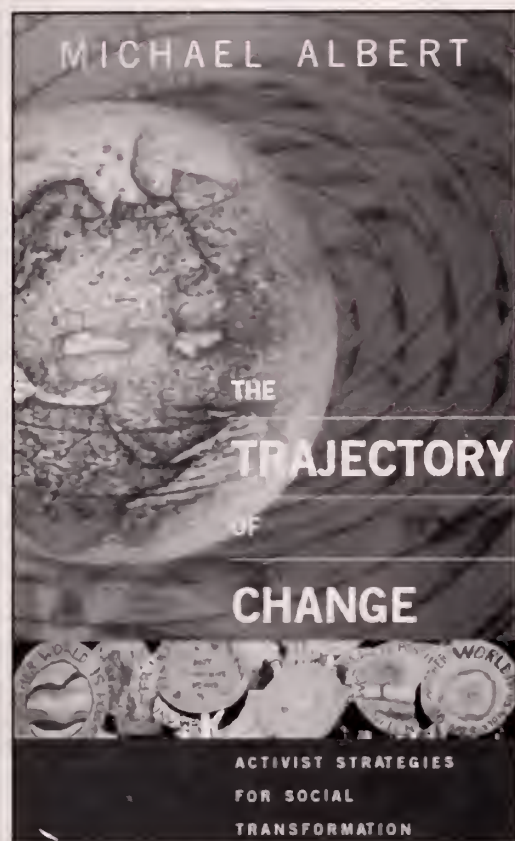
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ANTIBALAS

LA ORQUESTRA



DE AFROBEAT

by Andrew and Alex Anon

photos by Tracy

Antibalas is an Afrobeat orchestra from Brooklyn, NY with over a dozen members representing a variety of musical and cultural backgrounds. Afrobeat was pioneered by Fela Kuti, the Nigerian superstar who combined elements of funk, jazz, Afro-Cuban dance, and highlife (a Nigerian dance music with a colonial past) into a vibrant new amalgam. In doing so, he established what has been called a "cultural loop" between the two continents, imbued with the radical politics of liberation. Antibalas's infectious combination of horns, bass, polyrhythmic beats, insurrectionary lyrics, and other instruments too numerous to mention, is addictive and inspirational. The group is organized as a non-hierarchical collective and seems poised to take the promise of Afrobeat to a new level. Their second album, *Talkatiff*, is out as of mid-March on Ninja Tune, but be sure to pick up a copy of their debut, *Liberation Afrobeat Vol. 1*, as well.

Alex and I jumped at the chance to talk with Martin C-Perna, one of the founders of Antibalas, and conduct a cross-genre discussion. In the course of our two-year history in the "post-punk neo no-wave" band the Intima, we've thought and talked a lot about what we're doing and where we're going. I myself am engaged in a never-ending mental dual between 1) the knowledge that yelling at people through microphones while playing amplified instruments actually reinforces the industrial mode of social relations, and 2) the simultaneous need to acknowledge and play with such contradictions, because there are so many of them in our lives. And one of the things we all agree on as a band is the desire to fight easy categories, thus chipping away at the little industries of subculture that people tend to identify with, and hopefully showing that the lines between "political" and "apolitical" aren't always as sharp as people feel. It's frustrating sometimes how difficult it can be for human beings to overcome our often-superficial differences and try to understand one another, because we can learn so much, not only about others, but about ourselves.

It was with all this in mind that Alex and I approached this interview. We wanted to discuss the commonalities that two groups coming from such different genres might have, and also get a better feel for any fundamental differences (which seem to be embedded in the cultural foundations of the music we play). When we first sat down with Martin, I handed him a copy of an interview a couple of us did recently and he immediately noticed that I had mentioned the name of Ivan Illich. This led right away to a discussion about our mutual admiration for the author of books such as *Deschooling Society* and *Tools For Conviviality*, which led us to Martin's belief of the importance of psychedelic plants as portals to "vestigial senses that

need to be re-opened" so that we can better understand our (lost) place in the natural world. This somehow led to the problems we've faced working in collectives, trying to speak as individuals while representing a group. And all this before we'd asked a single question! Read on for the rest of our conversation, which took place at the club in Portland where Antibalas was playing that evening.

A Conversation with Martin C-Perna, 1/15th of Antibalas

Alex: We were wondering if you could give us your background, not just as a musician, but in general.

Martin: Well, I was born in Philadelphia, I grew up there, I was a very good student in high school (laughing) and I was just part of this elite group of students that got pushed to good universities. I went to one year at Georgetown and I was going to get involved in being a diplomat and then... just went the other way. One of the first things that I saw, I was in the school of foreign service there, and they had these elections, we're like 17 years old and there were kids stuffing the ballot boxes, spending money, we're fucking 17 years old, you know? And that's where Clinton went...

Andrew: Learning the political process...

Unbridled competition for power. Seeing it up close like that, so raw, it just turned me off to the whole thing. That summer I became friends with some kids who went to Duke Ellington High School, it's the performing arts high school in Georgetown. One kid was a drummer, one kid was a horn player, so I was like, "I've got to learn an instrument." I started getting into saxophone, and I got to New York and I started playing in this ska/rock steady band that just started. It was a good place to get my feet wet and start playing because I'd never had any experience playing in a band. Then I played in this other group called King Chango which was sort of a Latin fusion band with cumbia and ska and some other stuff that got off to a really exciting start and then fizzled, and got commercialized. I left after it stopped being fun, like it had become a job.

We would play sold out stadiums in Venezuela and Colombia and I saw that music could be really fucking powerful, if you choose to make it, or you can choose to fucking entertain people and be a minstrel, and that's what I felt like in that group. And I felt like I had to do something different. At the same time I was doing stuff with Gabe Roth, who's the guitarist. He had a funk label called Desco and

I was playing on some of that stuff. I was part of an afro-funk project called the Daktaris and that was like the hottest shit that I have ever played on, but it was just a studio record. I wanted to start with a clean slate, so we called it Antibalas, had a couple members from that group, couple other people, it was like 6 or 7 people when we started out, and it just grew. You can have a vision for something but you can't get people to jump in right away, so it definitely took awhile to build up steam and momentum. And then all of sudden we had people showing up being like, "Yo, can I play in the group?" and before it was like, "Please, come on, it won't suck, I've got my shit together."

Andrew: The spirit of Fela Kuti is a driving force behind your music. Could you talk a bit about the history of afrobeat and how and why Antibalas extends this tradition?

Yeah, Fela's music was so powerful because it was always relevant. That's the whole key to anything is that it's relevant, the key to how much power that it draws. For instance, his music was powerful because it talked to people in their own language, which was Yoruba, English, and pidgen English, about shit that was directly affecting them, like traffic jams, these crazy traffic jams in Lagos where the cops would just pull drivers out of their car and start whipping them like dogs. Shit like that, about soldiers hassling people and killing people, people in Africa just grinning and bearing the suffering. I think in any sort of context you have to think about the relevance — how does it relate to someone who doesn't know what you're talking about, and also in the sense of creating alternative institutions — alternatives to television, alternatives to Britney Spears, alternatives to McDonalds. As activists, besides just protesting, we have to, in whatever way, create another set of shit so it's not just like, "Fuck A," but, "Fuck A and support B because it's there and it will nourish you."

Lyricaly, it's been really tough because we don't live in Lagos, Nigeria, so it's not relevant for us to copy that style or those themes, but at the same time it's just beginning to click with us. Amayo is the principal vocalist and he's really moving forward in terms of making lyrics that flow, that fit with the music, that make sense.

Andrew: Does he write most of the lyrics or are they a collective process?

Yeah, early on I would write these songs that were instrumentals like this one tune called "Resurrection of Courage." It was just called that for the longest time, we played it as an instrumental track for a year, and then he wrote some lyrics to it talking about how he got up the nerve to leave Nigeria and come to the states and try to make shit happen, and how courage is a lot of times the only thing standing between who we are and who we want to be, you know, us and that infinity of untapped potential that all of us have as human beings. Now it's become more of an integrated process of writing the lyrics as we write the music, and it's more cogent.

Andrew: Like, cohesive?

Yeah.

Alex: I'm interested in Antibalas being a collective. Being in a band with four people, like us in the Intima, it's hard enough to work by consensus. So I'm interested in how you all structure yourselves, how you make decisions...

Well, Antibalas as an idea is now about four years old. In the beginning, at least the first year, was pretty much all me just driving around making shit happen, designing the flyers, trying to do all this shit. I think with any idea, it comes from one or two people who try to motivate and serve as catalysts. All collectives have one or a couple people who act as catalysts because it doesn't happen spontaneously. A couple times for various reasons I had to go away — and the whole time I was like, "I want it to be a collective, I want it to be a collective," but at the same time I never withdrew myself enough to create enough space for other people to fill in. I'd be away, but just for a second, so there wasn't time for people to carve out their own roles within it.

And then I went away to Mexico for a month last year to my house to unwind and do some stuff, and when I came back it was more of a collective. And then I had to go away this summer, and when I got back AJ, the trombone player, was the conductor and he did a much better job... and the only part of me that wants to be conductor is ego and if I can kill that shit the band will be a lot better for it.

In any collective people need to play their positions, and realize that even the smallest role is essential. It's about creating examples, not to say that we have anything perfect, but it's about alternative models for organization that aren't hierarchical, that everybody has a stake in. And a lot of people, when you start a collective, have trouble because we're all trained to operate within hierarchies, "who's the boss?" you know, "who's in charge here?"

Every now and then in New York they have these parties on the subway lines. There was one that was on the yellow line so everyone wore yellow... drinking lemonade and eating bananas. People were singing, shaking the train, hooting and hollering. We got to this train station and all these cops rolled up in riot gear and they were like, "What's going on, who's in charge?" It's like, all these people who don't know each other, or just little groups of friends, and they're all wearing yellow. And we're just like "we're all wearing yellow and we're on the train. Is that a fucking crime?" And they're like, "who's in charge?" "Well, nobody's in charge, we're all in charge." So they couldn't take anybody because everybody was an organizer and we just outwitted them, so they sent the whole train straight to Coney Island, which is the beach, and we got out and had this big party. We did it by not having any leaders. We created this critical mass that was this magical peaceful beast, had as many heads as there were participants.

Andrew: That sounds really similar to the Reclaim The Streets celebrations where there are a few people who act as catalysts but the most important part of the action is that people take it on as their own. Alright... The New York Times has written, "Politically progressive without being dogmatic, Antibalas is a restorative force for people who need some fun to support their ideals." How do you think about resistance in a musical context? This is a source of ongoing debate and discussion for us in terms of how we engage people with



our music, hopefully in a way that's evocative, you know, and true to our hearts and not alienating or exclusive.

Well, fuck The New York Times. (laughter)

Andrew: ...amen to that.

But yeah, that's the trickiest thing, how to get messages across, you know, lay them out there. It's just like sitting at a table, you can slam someone a plate and, even if it's good for them, if it comes smashing at them they'll be like "Why did you slam that at me?" You know, rather than like offering it. I think it's a thing about maturity and learning how to deal with people with tact. You know, just tact. Studying Sufi poetry and literature, I'm just at the beginning of that, but learning so much about being a teacher, having something that you want to spread, you have to talk to people in their own language, respectfully, not condescendingly. It's all about getting to know people, feeling them out, and then with respect and tact and coherence, laying the messages out. And it's so hard to do, it's definitely something that I'm still working on a lot. Some nights it's really on and some nights it's off. I felt like I got a lot of experience... I live in this fishing village part of the year in Mexico, and it's a lot of folks who have a lot of common sense, incredible knowledge of nature, and how to get by. But a lot of folks totally believe in Catholic dogma and just don't have any experience with other ideas, so just talking to my neighbor — like, I'm reading all these Gnostic texts from the year 100 or 200 AD that were Christian teachings were so different than anything that any modern Christian would recognize, and just thinking, "How do I get this across, just, like, being real?" But we're so taught to be fake and learn how to speak with people within our own compartment, whether compartments of education, or of race, or of age, so even though we're all in the same world there's not that many spaces for communication other than "get off my lawn!" or "how much does this cost?" or "what time is it?" you know? And there's all these other ideas that everyone needs to be engaged in dialogues about, but we don't know how to talk to each other.

Andrew: That's something that we talk about quite a bit is just the idea of not, you know, laying everything out but sort of pointing people in the right direction, encouraging people to think for themselves and go out there and do their own research, their own thinking and processing.

Yeah, I think that's the best way. Sometimes it's frustrating because you want change, and revolution right now, you know, right after the show we want everything better and to walk out and it's a different world and... but at the same time, one of the things I'm learning is like "well, what if I'm wrong?" I'm going to look like the ass if all these people follow exactly what I said and I was wrong so instead it's like "I think these things are working and you might want to check them out." But at the same time with enough confidence and enthusiasm that they'll take you seriously and maybe follow up on it... so, we've gotten pretty good responses. I mean there are always people who are like "oh, they're political, I don't like anything that's political."

Andrew: Yeah, we get that bullshit all the time.

Alex: We always find that it's hard to break down the alienating aspect of performer and audience. We've at least moved farther from the punk aesthetic, which we grew up in, sort of writing songs that people can shake their ass to. It helps to break that down...

Definitely. I spent some time in DC and I'd go see Fugazi up at Fort Reno Park, and Nation of Ulysses, and some other groups, and it was cool. I was really impressed by the D.I.Y. ethic and in many ways Antibalas, just from the beginning, like, we print our own t-shirts, all the stuff that we do we do ourselves for the most part. And that was a huge impression on me. At the same time, musically, it was so alienating because even though it was like "alright, we're all together, it's a scene," it's still like "well those are the performers and these are the people that come to the show."

Alex: Yeah.

And maybe there were other classifications, "well those are the dudes who write that fanzine," and "those are the dudes who work for that little label" (laughter) but there was like a division, there was a hierarchy and it was still like, "I feel nervous talking to so and so because he's in the band." And at the same time the music was like... I like the spirit of it but it never fully engaged me, it wasn't that hot of a dance music, and I don't like to flail around, like... (more laughter)

Andrew: A mosh pit or something?

Yeah, and that's what's cool about this music being an African-based music is that there's very slight, if it's done right, division between the performer and audience. Everybody's engaged in some sort of movement, and energy interchange. If it's like the people are really cold we'll still have a good show but it won't heat up, the room won't heat up, you know? It could be the people, it could be us, chances are it's both things going on. That's why Fela's music, Afrobeat, Latin music, all music that comes from the sort of African diaspora, it's like participatory music, singing, clapping, dancing, and in that way it's very effective as

far as a music in struggle because struggle is all about reaching out to other people and being like "well, we're trying to get free, are you along for the ride or what?"

Andrew: We have a lot to deal with in terms of the division between performer and audience. We've been trying to move away from the rock aesthetic, you know?

Just beat-wise, like, subverting the usual approach to music that rock musicians take. But the division between stage and audience is definitely hard to overcome.

Alex: On your website you all say "You've been told all your life that anarchy = chaos. Learn the truth about the most humanistic, beautiful way of thinking." And I also noticed that you have a link to TAO, which hosts our website, and they're an incredible resource...



Yeah, personally, my whole sort of personal feelings on anarchy have evolved so that it's much more of a spiritual thing. I used to have this pin that said "no gods no masters" (in Spanish) and at the same time I've become really heavily spiritual... for me, god is life. Just like we're all alive sitting around here, and that spirit, whatever makes us alive and running around is, is...

Andrew: Like you're trying to connect to that original mystical impulse?

Yeah, for me it's about submitting to life, and by realizing the impulse of every living thing, and then bringing that back into a political behavior is like, "well, I'm only me, you know, I'm only a person, there's so many things that are bigger than me, so what do I do now?" Well, you know, I feel love for everything and I need to be responsible so that I'm not stepping on anyone else's toes, I'm not ruining anyone else's trip here on planet earth. So it's about ultimate freedom and about ultimate responsibility at the same time. What we're being pushed into is limited freedom and limited responsibility because in this day and age a lot of people are apathetic, they don't want to be responsible. As long as they have enough money to have some new electronics and some new clothes, that's all they want, and so if their freedoms are curbed, as long as it doesn't get in the way of material pursuits then they're happy with that. And that's what's so fucked up. And that at the same time that ideology is being sold to different countries that have up until this point operated under different traditions...

Andrew: Often forced on those countries...

Yeah... just seeing Mexico change over the past couple of years, more and more. And the sickest thing is that there are people who can afford the American standard of consumer life but most of the people who will never be able to attain that material standard spend their whole lives despising themselves or feeling inadequate, seeing all the shit that they can only imagine.

Andrew: Yeah, Illich has written about that quite a bit, the modern conception of poverty... Your spiritual approach to anarchism sounds very ecological to me, which I like. Like, living in the northwest the anarchist movement has a strong emphasis on ecological issues. I guess I'm curious, not to put you in any sort of ideological box, how you feel that anarchism is relevant to people around the world, not only to people in the industrialized north but also in the so-called developing world.

It's relevant in that having ultimate freedom as well as ultimate responsibility, it offers everyone the opportunity to realize their potential. "OK, you're not a peon, you're not a wage slave, you're not stuck in this one grind, this one sort of mechanical cog." A lot of it is just offering spaces to allow people to fulfill their potential as human beings. You know, George Bush could be murdered tomorrow (coughing on all sides) but nothing would change because people's hearts are still in the same place..."

Andrew: It's easy to focus on a figurehead like that...

Exactly, like no revolution can really have any integrity unless the people's hearts are with it. That was one of the reasons that the revolution in Cuba was so successful — I wouldn't call it a complete success because there's so many problems in Cuba, there's a lot of totalitarianism, but at the same time a lot of people's hearts were truly in it, there was a greater spirit of community... it's about people having pride in who they are, their cultural identity, and about just trying to live free without imperialist pressures. There has to be years and years of work trying to get people to change their own hearts. The rhetoric comes off as being flaky or idealistic, but when I've seen people change

personally to being more aware and more conscious it's because they've changed in their heart, not just because they went to the local leftist bookstore and read a whole bunch of magazines. It goes back to the idea of knowing something or understanding something; like, you can know that it's better to share resources but unless you understand it, unless you've actually done it and felt the joy of everyone not getting screwed, that's when you really start putting things in motion, "alright this is how things should be and I believe in it," and then your whole way of life is changed because you see that every action is either a step towards that or a step away from that."

Andrew: It's frustrating that we live in such a fucked-up society that it's so hard to get to that point, and even the mildest ideas come across as totally outlandish and radical...

Alex: What are your thoughts on the so-called War on Terrorism, both in terms of U.S. imperialism abroad and policies of social control domestically?

It's frightening, it's really frightening. Almost all of us were in New York on September 11, and I was more horrified by what happened after than the actual crashes, aside from the tragedy of people dying. New York became like a militarized zone, you couldn't get into downtown, all these army checkpoints. I lived out in Brooklyn and I saw all these army humvees rolling down the street.

And as far as human evolution, anyone who gets to a position of international prominence, who has any sort of vision, is killed almost instantly, or they're co-opted. All of these leaders have such short-term vision that they're completely blind, it's Orwellian, and they're going in that direction and it's not a happy world, you know? Again you have to change people's hearts, that's the only way you can get rid of terrorist acts. That comes from respect of other people's cultures, it comes from sharing resources, stepping back and giving people their space. It's hard, it's complete bullshit and it's frightening. Any leader, if they're a true leader, and not a ruler or manipulator, will reach out to human beings as human beings and appeal to their sense of love and not their sense of fear, and that's all that George Bush is pushing, the fear buttons, it's like fear and nationalism, "these people are gonna come take our shit, you should live in fear because of these people."

Andrew: Meanwhile we're taking everybody else's shit.

Alex: Pumping money into the military complex.

Things like building the oil pipeline through Afghanistan, and installing a government that's friendly to that, again it goes back... you know, the deeper I get into the writing of Ivan Illich it's like, "there's some alternatives." It's not even about creating sustainable energy, it's about learning about not being so reliant on energy at all, because energy is a drug. It's hard, just getting everyone to be more introspective, because so much of the messages that we're bombarded with is like "pay attention to what so and so is doing." The Real World, Survivor, soap operas, who in Hollywood is sleeping with who, so every time your attention is taken away it's like taking energy away from time that you have for introspection, but it's tough to pull yourself away from that because it's so attractive, it's so shiny.

Alex: Well, thanks for talking to us.

Yeah, thanks for thinking about the questions. I was talking to someone from one of the Seattle papers yesterday, and...it's just nice to get some real questions. ★

The Beat Within



listening to the voices of incarcerated youth

by David Inocencio and *The Beat Within* Writers

with Efty

The Beat Within is a weekly publication of writing and artwork by young people in detention facilities in San Francisco, Alameda, Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, San Mateo, and Napa Counties. It was founded in 1996 by me, David Inocencio, and Sandy Close, Executive Director of Pacific News Service.

This unique program connects incarcerated youths with a variety of people ranging from professional writers and young journalists to youth advocates and former teachers. But the primary characteristic of each *Beat* facilitator is a love for this population, because what really makes this program work is the relationships we build — by establishing trust and respect — with each of the youth we come into contact with.

As we enter our seventh year, *The Beat Within*, produced by Pacific News Service (PNS), continues to evolve its model for enhancing the communication skills of incarcerated teenagers. Through our conversation and writing workshops, we encourage detainees/wards to develop their voices and their ability to listen to and communicate with *Beat* facilitators and each other. Furthermore, by stressing the importance of their own voices, whether it be expressed through poetry, prose, rap, art, or commentary, we emphasize the youth's connection to the community at large.

Every week we bring in two topics and discuss them as a group. Workshop participants may respond to these questions by writing or drawing. We also encourage writings or drawings on any other topics that may interest them. Most of the writings from each workshop are printed in *The Beat Within* publication, and are typically distributed the following week to each individual site, as well as sent to those on our mailing list: probation officers, judges, teachers, ex-detainees, and folks incarcerated in other facilities.

Each day we receive numerous letters from ex-detainees who have changed institutions or gone home, judges, and family members who share how *The Beat* has helped somebody that they know. *The Beat* has grown from a four-page weekly publication in 1996, to a hundred-plus page publication.

When I came onboard in October 1995, *The Beat Within* was only a vision I had, given my past work experience with incarcerated youth. I spent close to five years working as a community youth advocate social worker out of San Francisco's Youth Guidance Center. So, I shared my idea with PNS' Executive Director Sandy Close to create writing/conversation workshops in juvenile hall. And given that PNS editors had already spent several years working with young people caught up in the juvenile justice system, we agreed that a writing workshop held in juvenile hall would give these young people an avenue to express their personal stories and views, and their anger and ambitions, to a community that usually only hears from politicians, teachers, and law enforcement, on the issues of juvenile justice — if it hears anything at all.

So our first writing workshop was conducted in January of 1996 in the girls' unit of Youth Guidance Center, San Francisco's Juvenile Hall. The workshop began on a biweekly basis, but spread quickly due to its success in touching lives and reducing tensions on the unit. Today, we conduct close to 40 workshops a week in as many units. Participation is voluntary.

Each *Beat* workshop is run by at least two adult staff members and often includes former detainees. The workshops run from 45 minutes to an hour-and-a-half and focus on two "questions of the week." Most of these questions involve personal experience: What's the most frightening thing that has ever happened to you? Who

has had the biggest influence on your life and why? Some questions are more abstract: How would you describe an ideal society? What would you do if you had \$100,000? And some address relevant news items: How did you feel about the death of Tupac Shakur? Why do you think violence is on the decline? After a brief general discussion, *The Beat* staff fan out and talk one-on-one with as many of the detainees as possible, sometimes transcribing their words when they can't or won't write (a number are functionally illiterate), or "conversating" with them on whatever is on their minds.

The workshops teach the young people involved two things: how to describe their own experiences and make them relevant to the larger world, and how to communicate more clearly and powerfully. Through one-on-one editorial sessions, kids learn to support their assertions with evidence, flesh out accounts with detail, structure their writings with the greatest impact, and also, along the way, improve their spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Most importantly, they learn to listen and learn from one another — even those they see as enemies. Hearing and acknowledging each other's pain is often more liberating than articulating their own.

The young people whose work appears in *The Beat Within* are in the system for various crimes — from murder, drug dealing, or gun possession, to running away from group homes or simply having no other place to go. They stay in juvenile hall while their case is pending, usually about a month or two, or while a placement is pending (this can last for more than a year). Many do not return home — the court sends many of these young people to other institutions such as California Youth Authority (CYA), the county camp, the adult penal system, or group homes.

By combining workshops with publication, we have been able to establish positive working relationships with these young people as they do their time. After they are released, *The Beat* continues to work with those who are interested either via telephone, fax, mail, or email. Many come in to help produce *The Beat* by typing, folding, and writing, and are given support to pursue formal education and life skills, as well as peer support. We are also beginning to teach interested young people how to construct and maintain personal web sites linked to *The Beat*.

The first issue of *The Beat Within* publication came out in September of 1996, as a result of our discussions about rapper/entertainer Tupac Shakur's death and how it had impacted the lives of so many incarcerated young people. It produced a tremendous amount of emotion in these youths, and at the time, there was no (real)

way for them to express their thoughts in juvenile hall. Thus, after nine months of workshops, *The Beat Within* publication was created to provide a weekly outlet for the thoughts, stories, opinions, and ideas of incarcerated youth. We have never looked back!

In addition, the back pages of *The Beat Within* contain what we call "The Beat Without." These contributions come from people from all over the United States, most of who are in the system, from death row to county jail to various youth facilities. Some BWO contributors are now in the free world.

I can't stress enough how important our *Beat Within* contributors are. Despite their pains, they are in a unique position to express themselves, and realize that they are not alone. In fact, through their writings and art, they discover that they are a part of a larger community. Furthermore, their voices, through *The Beat Within* publication, reach, touch, and hopefully, influence, the lives of judges, probation officers, families, community workers, youth, and many others, for our purpose is to educate ourselves and various readers inside and outside of system. This is why we challenge our writers to take it from a teaching point of view as they reflect on their past lives and look ahead.

But I hope you can get an even better feel for *The Beat Within* by taking a look at the following pieces written by our young *Beat* colleagues.

The Beat Within is published by the nonprofit organization, Pacific News Service, in San Francisco. PNS is a newswire service that also publishes a monthly youth newspaper, *Youth Outlook (YO!)* and founded the New California Media, an ethnic media collaboration. For more information, contact us at (415) 438-4755 or write us at *The Beat Within*; 660 Market Street, Suite 210; San Francisco, CA 94104.

-David Inocencio

Jason

The Beat often serves us as a platform upon which to stand and express ourselves, to release some of the pent up feelings, the passing ideas, beliefs, and/or uneducated opinions. And because there is no discrimination by the editors in choosing whether a poem about love or hate is printed, or an essay on socialism vs. capitalism, we all respect and appreciate the purpose it serves. Which is in part, allowing us all to discover our creativity, mentally escape our confines, and in some cases philosophically liberate our understanding of life and its many intricacies from the shackles of institutionalized prejudices, stereotypes, and

really backward understandings of history and what we've been told is our place, by people whom are sitting fat by keeping us in that place.

Then again, it's something else entirely to each individual. However we choose to, or attempt to, summarize what *The Beat* is and what its service is, there remains one common factor that keeps us anxious to contribute more and read what others have contributed — it's ours.

It is a collective of voices no longer marginalized, and it reflects the realities to every degree of our generation, however raw and uncut.

I sometimes think if *The Beat* were a land, or country, it would be that liberated territory we all mentally escape to. Where expressing the truth makes us stronger not weaker.

Even here, at what some call the "end of the road," in Pelican Bay (SHU), you find men 18 to 48 who read *The Beat* as it's passed from cell to cell, who, when they put it down, are anxious and eager to get at someone — maybe their son, daughter, neighbor, sibling, or even parents — about something they have read inside, a shared experience, an old memory, a fleeting glimpse of our former selves.

Whether it's a poem to Mama, a side story that leaves us reminiscing, or an essay that turns our minds right side up and gets us thinking about our lives and our futures, it is an opportunity to redeem ourselves in some small way, or an opportunity to enlighten today's youth about the future they face if they maintain their current course, to plant a seed of change and transformation in their outlook.

Being a 23-year-old indeterminate SHU prisoner, and having been through the Halls of YGC and 150th, I always feel a connection with all the youngsters going through it right now. I know how it is. I was once in B5 max. for over a year awaiting trial and mad at the world. Then it was CYA, the county jail, and ultimately the penitentiary where I've done five of the last 8-1/2 years in the trenches (holes, Ad. Segs. SHUs) getting madder and madder.

It took a long time, and a lot of struggling with myself, but eventually I was able to turn my anger and frustration into a determined energy. My case is not much different from most people my age in here. In fact, quite a few of them I know from YGC and other Juvenile facilities. Some have stayed strong, matured, and transformed their mentalities, others have stayed stubborn and continue to be victims of their own immaturity and ignorance, banging their heads on the same mistakes they made at 15 years old.

I'm sharing a little about myself with *The Beat* because it really speaks about the true nature of my relationship with *The Beat*. More

than a sense of solidarity with all the captive brothers and sisters, I feel a sense of obligation and responsibility in doing what I can to prevent others, the youth especially, from continuing their headlong flight into the system. Carrying this out is no easy task because I know how impressionable these youngsters are to the things we do rather than the things we say.

We should all see *The Beat* as not only a window of expression, but as a vehicle of redemption. To redeem ourselves in our own minds and hearts, to demonstrate a transformation from blind to conscious indifference to conscience guided, and selfish to selflessness is not only possible, it is a necessity to our very survival and our drive to be both free and more fully human.

For such an opportunity I am deeply grateful to *The Beat* and *The Beat* family of workers and contributors, and encourage all to continue to contribute the best of themselves to *The Beat* in order that it may inspire others.

Each one teach one.

Until the last become first.

Joey

I started writing for *The Beat Within* when I was 15 years old. I was incarcerated in Santa Cruz County Juvenile Hall for a victimless drug related crime (Being under the influence). I was supposed to leave the next day but I ended up spending nearly two months in the Hall because my Mom refused to come pick me up or even have me released to her. I was strung out on heroin at the time and going through hellish withdrawals.

I remember the first time I came into contact with *The Beat Within*. They came into the juvenile detention facility that I was incarcerated in to do a writing workshop with the inmates, which I found out took place every week. They started a discussion about different things — about life, about what it's like to be incarcerated, about different issues going on in the world, and whatever else they or we wanted to talk about. They read a couple of topics that they had chosen, to give us some inspiration and ideas to encourage us to write. They then passed around paper and pencils to anyone who wished to participate and told us we could write about whatever we wanted. Most of the kids seemed really interested and excited that they could express themselves on paper and see it published in a weekly magazine.

The Beat was our magazine. It still is the pure undiluted voice of incarcerated youth. It's very empowering to those who have lost all power and freedom. It definitely helped those incarcerated to stay sane (including me)

in the horribly stressful and oppressive situation we were in. We could read what other kids in Juvenile Halls all around the Bay Area were going through. Everyone seemed to look forward to the weekly workshops. We realized that we weren't alone and that so many others were going through the same thing as we were.

The writing brought up a whole range of emotions. We were saddened reading the thoughts of tortured souls who had it so rough their whole lives only to be heading to prison or CYA. We laughed at the pieces of the comedians who always seemed to have a humorous comment about everything, and made us feel better by making light of their current situation of being locked up. We were amazed by the intelligence of the brilliant intellectual and political philosophers who gave us insight into the world that we had never dreamed. We were

also inspired and moved by the amazing and diverse poets who wrote moving ballads about everything under the sun and moon.

The Beat made writers out of people who had never seriously written anything before in their lives. *The Beat* definitely made a writer out of me. It was something I felt, and still feel a part of, something that made me proud. Proud to see my work published no matter how horrible my writing skills were.

I know it has helped so many youth that are incarcerated in the Juvenile Justice System by giving them a voice and an outlet of expression, letting them get out their thoughts and emotions, while in the process helping them improve their writing skills. It's easy to feel forgotten and neglected when you're incarcerated. *The Beat* has helped so many of us realize that we're not alone.

Mervyn

Question, how does it feel to be locked up?

Stressful?

Feeling a little lonely?

Want to be with your family?



How does it feel to be stuck in that little cage they call cell or "your room?"

What can you do when you are thinking about being free?

Thinking about all the fun you were having when you were out and now you have realized that you messed up?

All those things I have just mentioned, I have been through and was going through for four long years. All the things: the way I was feeling, the loneliness I was experiencing, and the feeling of being controlled; I kept all that in me in the beginning of my incarceration. I didn't talk to staff about my problems. I didn't share with them my story, and I didn't tell anyone because I was afraid no body would hear me. I was afraid when I shared my feelings with others that they might laugh at me. That's why I kept it to myself.

When I was introduced to *The Beat*, I found a friend. A friend that gave me a feeling of safety, a friend that was always there to listen to my problems, my thoughts, and my feelings. This friend gave me the freedom I so wanted, the freedom we all cherish when we are behind those metal doors. For those who don't know what I am talking about, my friend is a tool everybody uses. My friend is

thin, it can have lines on it, and it can also have no lines. It comes in all different types of colors and shapes, and it can cut you if you are not careful. Everyone, meet my friend, paper.

Yeah paper. This is what *The Beat* introduced me to, a piece a paper and a pencil. Then I soon learned how to introduce the paper and pencil to my thoughts. Writing how I felt and what I thought felt good. Letting that load of stress, pain, fear, and dreams off my shoulders felt good.

You see, a piece of paper doesn't care what you write. And it also can't laugh back at you when you keep it real with other people.

The paper and pencil also helped me figure out how to turn my life around. See, that inspired me to write and plus writing gave me a chance to leave reality and forget about where I was. It allowed me to use my imagination and set myself free. It gave me a chance to share my thoughts and experiences with others. It also gave me a chance to look back at my old lifestyle and learn from it. Look at me! I used to write a lot and still do, but I never thought about writing on the streets.

Sometimes people tell me that I am a good writer and where did I learn to write so well or where do I get my ideas from. I tell them, do you know where I learned from? Books, that's right, books. I never even touched a book on the streets (except for those love books called, "How To Make Love All Night, or How To Please Your Lady" types).

I tell you, when you are in that lonely cell, you either can pick a book up and escape from reality or face reality and stress out. Books, like writing, gave me a way out and a way to escape reality, to be free for awhile. Isn't it funny how there are things that we never even bothered to do when we are out, but once we get locked up, we will do just about anything to escape the reality?

So, tell me, what has a piece of paper and pencil done for you?

Michael

It all started back on August 2, 1999, my 16th birthday. It was a hot Friday afternoon and I was bored out of my mind trying to find something to do with my girlfriend. Then, out of nowhere, my homeboy came by and told me that his house was just shot up. So I made a couple calls and before I knew it, I was sitting in a car with four of my friends. We were strapped and heading toward the supposed shooter's house to get retaliation. It was about 12:00 in the afternoon when we pulled up to the house. We circled the block twice to make sure that no one was watching or following us. On the third time around, we loaded our guns, pulled up right in front of

the house, and unloaded our clips into the house. Bang! Little did I know what I got myself into.

About three weeks later, I got caught for the shooting. I was being tried as the one who organized the shooting along with about seven other felonies and two misdemeanors. I was also the oldest out of the group and was already on probation for a violent crime, which didn't help much. I was already known by the police as a local gang member. I was placed under prop 21 and tried as an adult. As if that wasn't bad enough, they even hit me with gang related enhancements, 186.22pc. I spent a little under two years in jail going to court about every 2-3 months. All throughout my time I was praying to God that I would not have to go to prison. I was finally tried on August 22, 2001. I was convicted of organizing a drive-by and for attempted murder (shooting into an inhabited dwelling.) It was a miracle I guess that the jail life wasn't meant for me. And, no, I did not snitch.

Throughout my stay in jail, I was attending *The Beat Within* workshops each week. I read every *Beat* down to the very last word. During the times that I would read *The Beat* it would help me realize that I wasn't the only one on this earth who had it hard. I also realized that there is so much more for me to do than gangbang.

Little did I know, I was over my head deep into the gang life. Now I don't know how or when it happened, but for some reason I started to change. Over time I was starting to try to help others to get out of the gang life. I often wrote pieces for *The Beat* and drew a lot of pictures. At first all my writings were about my block and how I put it down. My drawings were all about trying to sneak in a "14" or something gang related in the picture without *The Beat* finding out about it.

Over time I matured and started to look further into the future than just tomorrow. I was writing pieces of hope. I had hope.

Every time that I saw my pieces in *The Beat*, it gave me a sense of pride knowing that I did something good. My words were strong and powerful, hitting you right in the center of your conscience, forcing you to pay attention. From then on, it was all about trying to keep readers reading my piece, while sneaking in a few tips on how to live right. I was growing mentally.

Another good thing that happened during my time of incarceration was that I meet this young man named Charles, a *Beat* facilitator. He was coo', always happy and ready to help others. This brings me to the next part of my story. One day, during one of *The Beat* sessions, Charles gave me his cell[phone] number and told me that when I

get out to call him so that I can get hooked up with a job at *The Beat*. I was amazed but thankful that there are people that care in this earth.

When I got out, I called Charles and was hired the same day. Since then, I have been working for *The Beat Within* as a writer/typist. *The Beat* is a great organization and I feel that it will, over the years, grow to be so much more. I have been working at *The Beat* for about six and a half months. I enjoy it 'cause I like to help others, and by working here it will give me a jump start on my life goals, which is to start my own teen center. It is also a coo' place to hang out 'cause everyone is so coo' with each other. Plus, it keeps me off the streets.

I used to gangbang and sometimes I still find myself doing it, but I need that help and encouragement to change just like so many more teens trapped in this cycle of crime. I just feel that if I have changed then anyone can change, and I want to be the one to help others change. Although I have a strike and am going to be on felony probation for another five years, I pray that I can continue to do good. It's still hard to stay straight 'cause I'm so used to being at the block. My friends still come to my house and knock on the door to see I if I want to kick it. Yeah, I still go down every now and then to say hi, but I try to stay away. Ain't nothing more important to me than my family and freedom.

To all of you out there who want to change but don't know how, or you for some reason can't say no to your homeboys, just think of that damn cell. Yeah you say it ain't nothing, but wait till you inside for something big. You'll feel the pain.

Rosa

The system is a revolving door, and for years I was caught up in what seemed at the time to be a never-ending cycle. It was like juvenile hall was my second home, and catching cases was contagious.

I was in love with the struggle to be rich quick, and nothing else mattered but having money in my pocket.

I never thought I'd see the day when I wouldn't have to duck and dodge from the police, where I could give my real name and age and not have to worry about getting sent back to the Juvenile for having outstanding warrants. Where I could be riding in a car and not be trippin' off of whether I would get pulled over or not. It seemed like forever when the day would come and I'd be off paperwork (probation).

As of today, I'm legit. Legit, and I'm lovin' it. I couldn't think of a better way to set off the new year. It's a new year, a new start. But it's only the beginning for me.

I'm currently working with *The Beat*. Picture that! Only last year I was in purple and khaki sneaking pencils in my room (cell), and trying not to catch roomtime when *The Beat* came through on Thursdays to conduct their weekly workshops.

Now I'm a part of *The Beat* team. Staying focused is my main concern right now. I'm not going to end up a statistic and a number. I cherish my freedom and enjoy doing what I do. I can't imagine myself anywhere else but on top, and I'm not afraid of heights. I know where I've been and I know not to make the same mistakes twice.

These are just some of the trials and tribulations in my life. The story doesn't end there. Like I said before, this is just the beginning and I just got started. For me, moving on means not dwelling on the past, it's moving up. Taking it one day at a time is all I can do. What happens next has to be a turn for the best because I love my position at the moment.

Tim "Bagpipes"

Thoughts on Freedom. An Email
February 2002

It was really good to talk to you. I can't thank you enough for all the support you've given me throughout my time. The only way I can think is to give a little bit of my own time back, and maybe help someone else that needs support.

I think that *The Beat Within* is one of the best things to ever happen to incarcerated youth, and my support, such as it is, is entirely behind it. Here are a few thoughts on the first couple of weeks of freedom.

There is no feeling quite like walking out of the gates of a correctional institution, and after three years, the idea that my freedom had been handed back to me after I had so carelessly thrown it away doesn't quite sink in at first. I walked giddily from the gate to the car, face split in a wide smile that would not go away. The day I was released was sunny with some puffy clouds, quite warm for a mid-January morning. I got into the car, and we pulled out of the parking lot. I never looked back, knowing exactly what was behind me. That part of my life was over, and a new chapter was just beginning.

I wrote quite a bit for *The Beat* through my incarceration. Writing helped me deal with the pressures of imprisonment, and gave me a chance to put my thoughts down on paper for introspection. I learned a lot about who I was, how I felt, and what I needed to change within my own life. The title of the paper, *The Beat Within*, is quite personal to me. I feel it describes the internal struggle in everyone, especially me, to deal with life, to look at experiences, to learn and grow in many

different ways, and to ultimately better oneself through a process of personal discovery.

Change happens from within. You will always be thrust into different environments, but the places were the same before you got there, and generally they are the same when you leave. The true change is the change within yourself, which can come from the impact the environment has on you. Writing helps me collect my thoughts, and develop a closer relationship with the spirit that dwells within my body, my humanity.

We drove down through Stockton, and stopped at a Jack in the Box so I could grub on some true greasy junk food for the first time in ages. It felt strange not to have to wolf down my food in five minutes, or have some corrections officer there to gripe about things. My reality seemed a dream, not quite substantial. We drove down through San Jose, and I couldn't help but feel that if I kept going, I would never stop. I would just keep traveling straight, and there would never be a fence topped with shiny razor wire to stop me. There would never be a security vehicle to interrogate me on my destination. There would never be an end to this freedom. I felt as if I could fly as I looked out the window at the cars going by, the people

walking. I could feel the ebb and flow of freedom, pulling me ever onwards, and the time I spent in jail just seemed to heighten my sensitivity to life.

Over the next two weeks, I couldn't eat very much. I didn't consciously feel nervous or anything, I just wasn't hungry, for food that is. I would sometimes just leave the house and wander down streets, looking at stores, people, schools, and cars as if they weren't just normal everyday parts of life.

I looked for a job, and found one, and was thusly thrust into the labor force, earning my money with true work, reaping the benefits of capitalism, and suffering the indignities of taxes.

It never really hit me as one solid moment that I was free. It crept up on me, overtook my mind, and sank in, washing away the stain of the term "ward," or "convict." Now, I can't really think about being locked up. It's behind me, in the past, and to look back would be to fail. So, I keep my face ever forward, walking down the street, a free man.

I hope it touches someone that needs some hope, you know. Anyway, I'll talk to you later. ★

Writing is a place for me to go whenever I need to vent.
Happy feelings,
sad feelings,
or just an event that has happened in my life.
I write through my eyes and feelings.
I write about the world,
how I see it through my eyes
or what I am feeling inside.
Writing is a powerful tool.
By reading my writing
I can transfer thoughts from my head
and plant them into another person's.
I started writing to share my experiences of gang life.
At first it was to glorify it,
but I soon found the answers that I was seeking,
through my own writings!
I got involved in writing,
while incarcerated in a San Francisco, CA Juvenile Hall,
through a writing program called "The Beat Within."
A few *Beat Within* facilitators quickly gained my trust.
I then began to open up my feelings
and poured them out through ink
onto pieces of paper.
Writing helps me get through the day,
sometimes.
Writing just means a lot to me.

from Mervyn





SONGS FOR EMMA

INTERVIEW BY RICHARD GILMAN OPALSKY

Songs for Emma is a band of four people playing what I can only describe as melodic, anarcho-punk rock n' roll music that resides somewhere in the margins of the punk rock scene. They have two albums out on Broken ReKids, "11.12.98" and "Red Lies Black Rhymes." The demographic of *Songs for Emma* is certainly unusual considering the makeup of most musical projects within the scene they belong to: Members of *Songs for Emma* are in their mid-30s to 40 years old and have been playing in bands, collectively, that have spanned the past twenty years. Members of *Songs for Emma* played in A.P.P.L.E., Zero Defex, The Bettys, and Strawman; they also publish a political magazine and work at AK Press. And, although it is sad that such a distinction should still be so uncommon, they have a female drummer who plays like most male drummers' teacher.

Songs for Emma is not an experimental band with a new sound, nor do they receive the benefits of fitting into a fetishized and hip sound. Their sound has a certain familiarity, yet is not popular enough to win them any mass appeal, even within their own subculture. I was compelled to do this interview with *Songs for Emma* because I think they have a great deal to say and they say it through music that is soothing, intelligent, and carefully constructed. But mostly, I wanted to do this interview because I believe that most of the people interested in grassroots music and politics are missing out on the fruits of all their hard work.

Clamor: *The name of your band, Songs for Emma, is an unashamed dedication to one of the greatest anarchists of the twentieth century, Emma Goldman. To be writing songs, in a sense, for Emma Goldman, for the*

struggles that she represented and for the spirit of her life is an ambitious project indeed. And because Songs for Emma is an overtly political band, I feel perfectly comfortable in taking this dedication rather seriously. In other words, although I know you don't pretend to be a band of comparable significance to Emma's life of struggle, Tommy admits that he "wrote songs with her beliefs and big heart in mind." No doubt, your name is not a pretentious quip. Could you elaborate on how Songs for Emma may actually be considered "Music for Emma" and how it is connected to the goals that she worked toward?

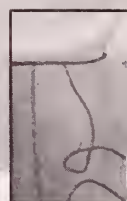
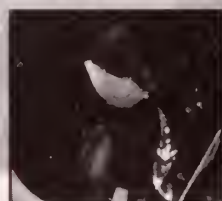
Tommy: You, as I do, put Emma up on an inaccessible pedestal. She was very, very human, full of life, passion, anger, and looked to the people for guidance more than any political experts... the essence of anarchism. She was loved for her humanity. I write some songs with her in mind (would you approve Emma?), though these overbearing topical rock n' roll songs would seem somewhat trivial to her I think... almost a form of escapism? It is a valid form of communication and rebellion, but it doesn't touch the real work that needs to be done. Emma's goals I would say were: to organize internationally against capitalism for sustainable and bottom-up organized economics, propagate for a free and just society in all respects, and to live one's life with profound compassion for others. Within these goals will lie your day-to-day compromises, losses, limitations, and sometimes, victories. So with that, I can't say that this band is really connected to her goals without sounding arrogant, except in the "propaganda of truth" aspect. I did call it "Songs for"... not "Songs of." I am singing (screaming in anger more often) for similar

beliefs and trying to reach or laud the present day Emmas, Erricos, Voltairines, and Joe Hills who are here among us and working and walking forward.

Craig: Also keep in mind that what separated Emma from Malatesta or Johann Most or many others was that she refused to compromise or neglect personal passion/enjoyment for "the revolution." She liked to party, dance, and fuck. Emma stressed that the passions for life and the passions for better lives through social political revolution were inescapably intertwined. This could lead to danger and confusion as liberal feminists adopt her lifestyle without politics, or Anarchists espouse politics without really living.

How important is it to you that people who are interested in Songs for Emma understand the politics of its band members? What do you see as the responsibility of Songs for Emma to make sure that its social content gets communicated in a live setting or on a record?

Tommy: I am horribly not eloquent between songs. I have also seen too political bands bore and condescend so much, having been in punk bands for 22 years, that I force myself to even say less than I would. So, live, it's the songs, our approach to the audience, workers/other bands with complete respect, and the lyrics that defines us — if you can understand the words through the often shitty PAs. I try to limit myself to a basic introduction. Our CDs are obvious. Black and Red colors on the first, with very long descriptions and explanations after each song. People's overall comprehension of where a band is coming from is much more astute than music journalists give them credit for. The



social content of our songs is so obvious. People understand without me giving any speeches. And it is rock n' roll. Are the other band members even anarchist or anarchist-syndicalist? I expect the audience, the people that come to see us and egg us on, don't really care for such rote uniform assurances and they understand that Craig, Diane, and Mike agree with the overall thrust of the band and lyrics. In bands where the members pay from their wages to play and practice every month, you would be hard pressed to find a member that hates the politics or songs. People for the most part are not stupid enough to hold my personality or my tight-butt syndicalist politics over the other three participants' heads. I also think we have a responsibility to people that pay to see us play, that give us support, to give them some type of catharsis or enjoyment. Bands and other artists have only ever been a soundtrack or backdrop of radical change. I am only hanging red and black curtains and painting banners with a band . . . not doing the real work that needs to be done.

Craig: Tommy, to answer the first part of the question, I would stress that beyond the music, the band members are all involved in daily activities purposefully chosen to keep in line with anarchist ethics/meaning workplace democracy. Mike has been a long time worker at Rainbow Veggie store, Diane at collectively run Arizmendi, and I at AK Press. We play anarchist music, we live anarchist lives. We hate the fucking capitalist system.

How do you think anarchists on the one hand and punks on the other can more effectively address present day social problems? For example, the idea that the causes for terrorist attacks on the U.S. are largely to be found in

U.S. foreign policy and international militarism is an idea that has gained more traction on the American left in recent times. But how do you think that punks and anarchists can help to further this discourse?

Tommy: Through print and through massive direct democratic militant union organizing, not through sloganeering — as I do — on a rock n' roll stage. *Clamor* is a definitive example of print's power. But the press never leads the people, they lead themselves in truly progressive steps forward according to history. We go to "our" band shows, those bands that speak to "us," mostly cuz we want to support the rebellious bands, see like-minded people, and have a good time. The last 20 years of underground punk rock should prove to us all that cliques create more cliques . . . and they often represent the same conformist middle class bourgeois values that we sought to escape. Every radical, every worker deserves any (pseudo-) community that we create for support and friendship. We all deserve a good time whenever it can be had. But to look to how to really stop the war machine, to create social justice — even in the USA, a very rich country where workers can't even find housing — we should look to the past. Magazines, newspapers, and more importantly mass organizing on an economic base. Hundreds of thousands of people in the U.S. are doing this very thing. Though we still have not hooked up on, or federated under, a cogent non-statist anti-capitalist umbrella. That is, everyone seems afraid to be stridently anti-capitalist in the U.S. This is where I am against the idea of "zine discourse" if it means I have to talk with smug-face liberals that deny the U.S. government is the predominant imperialist state and that it murders people daily. I will

not agree to disagree with smirking little shits anymore. Class war. And the top down has been waging war against us drastically since the late '70s under Carter and Volker. Hey, too, this past has nothing to do with the AFL-CIO or the Teamsters. I can't take the space here to go into how little our present day "unions" had anything to do with radical change and social justice. Remember that in the '20s and '30s there were tens of thousands of radical left papers all across the country as well as hundreds of radical left unions. Remember that the CNT was only created on top of more than 30 years of direct organizing in workplace, in factory, and in field . . . Not through ads in a Spanish *Nation* or public radio or by a bunch of radical musicians. Compromise in your day-to-day battles yes, but forget this idea of a liberal left "movement." There is no basis in history for it to provide any real progressive change.

Tommy, you publish an Anarchist-Syndicalist zine called The Rattlesnake. This enormous publication is in stark contrast to what can rightly be considered the rather minimalist packaging of Songs for Emma CDs. Has Songs for Emma ever considered including more substantive packaging for its CDs in order to expand its attention to issues of deep concern?

Tommy: Craig wanted to. I feel I am all over the CDs so much I didn't want to add more of me. The magazine was an outlet that I had hoped would allow a larger expanse, or, say maybe a more passionate less direct approach to the lyrics on this new second CD. But again, every song is pointed and topical. I can't stop writing songs that deal with issues and so I always feel like I've had my say — enough is enough. I believe that much more

in-depth information can be provided through the newspapers and magazines already available, that we all need to work on in our areas, and certainly create many more. I think that face-to-face direct democracy within the context of organizations that are anti-capitalist is so much more needed and valuable than what inspiration I could add onto a six-inch bit of plastic. I would agitate for this, rather than me trying to provide information that is easily available to the few that will buy our album.

Mike: The new CD has some cool cover art that I think captures the feeling of the band. It's subtle yet visually interesting.

What do you see as some of the advantages and disadvantages of being involved in a musical subculture where you are significantly older than the general population?

Tommy: No matter what cracks I have made over the mic in the past few years, said over beers with friends, the people under thirty or teenagers that are in this "punk scene" seem ten times more engaged, active, and educated than me and my punk friends were in Ohio in the early '80s. I am honored that when we play Mission Records, where half the crowd is under 25, that they stand there and give me such respect . . . listening and commenting after. There is absolutely nothing I can teach those people, I can only prove to them that not every American radical gets jaded and disappears. I hope that I prove that as you get older — the more you educate yourself, the stronger your beliefs become — that you will gain a much more deep-seated compassion and faith for people and an even bigger love for life, its ironies, its challenges. For the first time in my life I am really scared about dying. I see too much ahead. Otherwise, since we have not done any lengthy states tour, only Europe, understand that the majority of people that come to see us in bars in San Francisco are in their late 20s and 30s. Disadvantages? None, but then we don't go near the more above ground "Fat Wrecks" or I-sing-songs-about-corn-in-my-poop "punk market." Not that they want us. I think even low-key Mike Millet would get in a fistfight backstage at those Vans Warped tours or whatever they're fucking doing this year. But then that's a class thing isn't it and not an age thing? Really, at this point I wouldn't mind doing a tour with a good political retro hardcore band. I trust them and their crowds more, though I may find some of the music too metal or lacking in worker rock n' roll melody. A secret: Mike has been changing all the flyers at the warehouse where we practice . . . It's a huge complex . . . so many types ya know . . . and every time he



sees a flyer "looking for guitar player into punk, Korn etc . . ." with a young age limit on it, usually under 20, he scribbles on them to say "over 40." There is no age limit to education, organizing, and yep, loving your own troubled but vibrant life.

Mike: For the most part, younger people are not weary and jaded. I find they are usually more open to different types of music and ideas. (Unless they get indoctrinated into a musical gang and start labeling themselves under 21 punx!) I think in a way "the kids" help us keep perspective and also from getting jaded.

The new album has really excellent lyrics, addressing myriad topics from local exploitation by landlords and politicians to U.S. cluster bombs going off in the Nis marketplace in Serbia. Characteristically, I have noticed that Songs for Emma tends to write heavily class-based lyrics and is seriously concerned with issues of labor. Please explain how class disparities can be realistically addressed in the U.S., a country where there is no solid socialist movement.

Tommy: Please tell the world never to use the word "labor" around me . . . my 'rhoids flare up. It is a liberal classification and also rooted in that Leninist-Marxist crap of American radical politics for over fucking 50 years now. It says that only someone in a factory, those bluecollars, are workers and they must join their "labor unions." I cringe every year when *The Nation* comes out with its "labor" issue. This shit reinforces the belief, mostly only prevalent in the U.S., that anyone with a college education in ANY kind of non-bluecollar work (blue-collar meaning factory, sanitation, healthcare, etc) is not a worker, no matter how screwed, underpaid and powerless they are. A worker is a worker if he/she calls themselves that, and they work . . . I know that sounds simple, but I think

I am honored that when we play Mission Records, where half the crowd is under 25, that they stand there and give me such respect . . . listening and commenting after. There is absolutely nothing I can teach those people, I can only prove to them that not every American radical gets jaded and disappears.

you understand . . . A professor under threat of losing a job that works for radical democratic progress, say even as something as simple as organizing with a local welfare rights union, is a worker under my anarchist umbrella. By the way, I am the son of a doctor in Ohio. I had all the clothes and food I needed for the first 18 years and went to Miami University and Kent State. I assume the readers of *Clamor* would know the difference between a fighter and a sleeper. Being bourgeois is not just income level, but attitudes about life, class, history, and what constitutes day-to-day desires, and of course, how a person perceives how to change the world for the better. Class disparities — I take that if you mean class war from top down cuz that is all that seems to be happening now — cannot be addressed in this country by bluecollar versus homeowner versus "professional" versus small business owner. We then fall into the same old tired Leninist poo-poo, of the smart militants leading the dull masses. I am an anarchist, not a Marxist, though the word socialism when addressing economics does not make my knee-jerk, but I certainly don't see class lines drawn so clearly as my lyrics imply. I write songs about people. The bad people are those with power and have their own interest to watch out for, which is to increase their wealth at all human cost. The good people are the workers, whatever that means to anyone, who seem to be stuck in a turnstile, or terminal of sadness in this country . . . though this class surely has many fucked up racist and power-hungry screwballs too. And then I write many songs about mass murder, social injustice, and imperial massacres. Surely as a citizen of the U.S., I should show anger over what my government does in my name. How do we address class? We become one. We accept no power play seats at the table with corporate whores. We are the power. One big union or one hundred federated unions — the opposite of the AFL-CIO. So much of what people

think of "class" or "labor" is based on the '80s, and '60s so that I begin to think the brainwashing is complete. That harangue aside, I do admit that I should write less topical songs. I have tried. The original Songs for Emma had a female vocalist. I was trying to sell out and shut up. It didn't work. I finally admitted to myself several years ago that I am "stuck" in this barking angry propaganda mold and it is what I do best.

Mike: Again the people who pretend they're cool and know everything will have expectations involving what they think a political band is, i.e. boring, dadaist bar band rock with too-heavy subject matter that they already know about and have heard before.

First it was Henry Kissinger, and now, just this morning, I hear that George W. Bush and Tony Blair are up for the Nobel Peace Prize! What is your reaction to this tradition of awarding war makers peace prizes?

Tommy: Haven't the Nobel Prizes been washed of any meaning by now? I was just

thinking of asking my roommates to name one winner . . . and I bet they would say "Who the fuck cares?" Did Roberta and Nelson get one? Well, what do you expect . . . the upper-class brainiacs sometimes bow to social pressure and then more often to power pressure. Clinton should have one too . . . the dirty, crass SOB deserves the company. Kissinger had to RUN to the airport in Paris a while back . . . hehehehe . . .

Mike: Perhaps we could start a Kissinger War Prize? There could even be categories for banks, heads of State, corporations, etc.

Through the years, what has kept you inspired and what do you see in the future for Songs for Emma?

Tommy: I think there are only two reasons I still play in a band: one, for ten years I have had San Francisco people tell me they wanted to play with me, which is an amazing ego booster for someone that has never really sold units, and two, a few hundred or so people tell me to keep doing it. Otherwise I think it is of not much value in the whole scheme of things. It is a creative outlet and I really like

meeting and talking with people before and after shows. I think it is a very self-centered thing to do but if it helps me be engaged or sociable, then a band is important. Our future? It looks kind of sad . . . We may lose Craig and we may not be able or want to replace him. Could be really sad to lose the band after this new album. Fuck, I'm 40 — we can't quit now! ★

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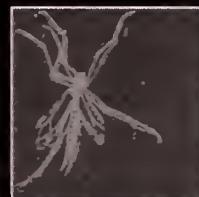
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Making Innocence Look Evil

The Harry Potter Incident

by Felizon Vidad

I drive past the Merritt Island Baptist Church every day on my way to work. I hardly ever pay attention to it, even though it's a huge building and the entire property – including the parking lot – takes up a couple of city blocks. On one particular morning this past spring, I noticed a large, prominently displayed banner on the church grounds:

Harry Potter: Making Evil Look Innocent.

The sign receded from my rearview mirror. I knew what that was all about. Members of the Baptist Church had joined the crusade against Harry Potter. There were individuals who believed that J.K. Rowling's books were teaching children to worship Satan, to drink blood and cast evil hexes on innocent Christians. Now a movie based on the first book was being released, and there were those who wanted to prevent guileless children from being exposed to Potter's wicked, sinful ways. No matter that some of these people hadn't read the book. They had watched the video, *Harry Potter: Witchcraft Repackaged, Making Evil Look Innocent*. They had quotes from the Bible that pointed to the evil in Rowling's books, quotes that showed how the devil worked through a children's author.

I kept driving. I tried to forget about it. I didn't think that I would ever have to deal with anyone imposing their religious beliefs on my freedom of choice. I was wrong.

This year, Halloween fell on a Wednesday. I knew that my students would be too hyper to sit still through yet another grammar lesson, and I needed a break myself. A class trip to the library would make the perfect lesson plan. The kids could check out books and read for pleasure, and so could I. Reading for pleasure leads to more reading, and the more I could get my students to read, the better they would become at it. Many of my eighth graders are reading at a sixth grade level or lower. I teach at a middle school located in the middle of housing projects, where over half of the student body is on free or reduced lunch, and the majority of the kids are judged by the color of their skin and the area in which they live. The socioeconomic factors are already stacked against them, and one thing that can save them is knowledge and education. Reading and books. A trip to the library.

By 9:30, my first period class was ready to go. They had finished their Daily Language Workout and we had graded last night's homework assignment. Now Accelerated Reader books had been fished out of various bookbags and backpacks, owners anxious to

complete Accelerated Reader tests. They were a good group of kids – all 36 of them. And even though they were eighth-graders and had a reputation for being difficult students, there wasn't a mean, surly one in the bunch.

"Let's go," I said, and we all started our walk to the library. On the way, a few of them good-naturedly joked with me; a few others clowned around, pushing and bumping and teasing each other. Everyone seemed to be in high spirits as we approached the red brick building. But I was bracing myself for the minute those kids actually walked in through the library's doors.

It's not that I thought my students would go wild. I knew they were perfectly good kids. It was the new librarian who I was worried about. The last time these students had visited the library to check out books, the librarian came hurrying out of a back room and immediately began scolding: "This is NOT the way that you should enter the library! You do NOT come in making a lot of noise and carrying on! You do NOT ..." and so forth. At the time, I was so taken aback that I didn't know what to say or how to respond. I didn't think my students had been boisterous or disruptive at all.

I didn't think that the same condescending treatment would happen again, but it did. This time, the students were milling around among the shelves, looking through books and talking to each other. I was with them, reading the blurb on the back of a book and contemplating checking it out. Nobody in the room was throwing books; nobody was looking at copies of *Jet* magazine's Beauty of the Week and giggling. I hadn't heard any squawks that usually indicated foul play, and I didn't think that anybody was out of line, but all of a sudden, a voice carried out across the library. It was the librarian, and apparently, she was pissed. She hollered, "Everybody freeze!" Her voice was shrill.

I looked around me. My students stopped moving, stopped talking. Several tables away, eight adults sat around a conference table. Six of them were teachers, and apparently they were involved in a child-study meeting. They seemed to be deep in discussion, but I was paranoid anyway. Did they just hear the librarian scream at my students?

"I said, *everybody freeze!* Do you understand what freeze means? It means don't talk, don't open your mouth, don't move any part of your body!"

I didn't know about my students, but I knew that I sure was frozen. I couldn't believe it. Was this really happening? Was this insane woman yelling at my students and undermining my authority as their teacher? I had never known her to do this with the white teachers who taught the students in the Gifted Program, but I knew several of the black teachers had complained about the way they had been treated. Now I was experiencing it myself. Again. Inwardly, I squirmed with embarrassment. I hoped that the adults in the back of the room weren't paying attention to this public humiliation, to the way my students were being scolded by someone else as if I had no disciplinary control over them. I was mentally cringing. Across the room, sitting at the circulation desk where she was frozen, too, the librarian's assistant gave me a sympathetic look.

Satisfied that she had instilled order and silence and a level of civility in the room, the librarian returned to whatever she had been doing before we disturbed her peace. At that moment, it became very clear to me who felt she ruled this territory. I walked over to Mrs. Jackson, the librarian's assistant.

"Hey, Mrs. Jackson," I said. "How's it going?"

Mrs. Jackson smiled warmly and reached across the circulation desk to take a book from a student. "Hey there, Ms. Vidad. Haven't seen you in a while! You used to come in here just about every other week last year."

That was true. I was in there all the time. Then again, Mrs. Kay, our librarian last year, never yelled at the students. If they got too loud and boisterous, she would smile at them and gently say, "How nice that you are all so excited to be here! But let's remember the others around us, and let's try not to disturb them." It wasn't a hundred percent effective all the time, but the kids liked her and she liked them.

"It's Halloween, Mrs. Jackson," I said. "Where are all the Halloween decorations?"

Mrs. Jackson picked up another book and scanned its barcode into the computer. She lowered her voice. "Now you know she's a minister's wife, right?"

I did, as a matter of fact, know that. Mrs. Jackson didn't have to say who "she" was. She didn't have to provide further explanation for the absence of Halloween decorations in the library, either.

"She doesn't even like for the kids to be reading Harry Potter," Mrs. Jackson continued.

"Is that right?" Now I was really interested. It occurred to me that I had not seen one Harry Potter book on the shelves as I was browsing through them.

Last year, we had over a dozen. The books filled a shelf and a half when they weren't checked out, but they were so popular that Mrs. Kay could barely keep them in the library.

I leaned over the circulation desk and peered at the computer where Mrs. Jackson was checking out books for students. "Would you mind pulling up the records for me, Mrs. Jackson? I want to see how many Harry Potter books we have."

The records appeared on the screen in a minute. There were four titles: *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Next to the titles, various numbers indicated that the school owned multiple copies of each particular book. According to the computer, there were four copies of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* alone.

"Now you see, here," Mrs. Jackson said, randomly pointing at different numbers and titles and going down the list, "this one is checked out, this one is checked out ... but this one here isn't checked out ... this one here, and this one here isn't checked out." She stopped

counting and looked at me. "So you know we do have those books, they're just not on the shelf."

"How long have they been off the shelf?"

"Let me see." Mrs. Jackson gazed thoughtfully at the shelves where the Harry Potters should have been. "We started school back in August, and you know I was out sick at the beginning ... But when I got back in September, those books were already off the shelves and the kids had been asking for them ..."

Mrs. Jackson trailed off. At that moment, the librarian walked up to the front desk.

"Mrs. Stone, I have a question," I said. "Where are all the Harry Potter books?"

The woman had a way of speaking to me as if I were one of the students. Or as if I didn't have a whole lot of sense. "The Harry Potter books. Well, ah, yes. Those books are very controversial. There's a whole controversy about them. In fact, that reminds me. Mrs. Anderson and I are supposed to sit down and have a conference about those books." Mrs. Anderson is our principal. "I need to make an appointment so that we can have that conference." Her body language and tone indicated that that was the end of the discussion. She busied herself with a stack of books, fiddled around with a few things around the circulation desk and drifted off to a back room.

I stood there, wanting to say something but not finding the right words. Talking to the librarian was like trying to teach the difference between predicate nouns and predicate adjectives to my students at 3:45 in the afternoon. I was stunned and it was slowly dawning on me that this woman had just managed to avoid giving me a straight answer. How long had the books been off the shelf and how did it escape my attention, particularly since I was the Language Arts department chairperson? What other titles had she decided to remove? If I hadn't raised the issue, would she have conveniently forgotten about it? If she hadn't discussed the issue with the principal yet, what was she doing removing the books in the first place? And anyway, what was there to discuss? The Brevard County School Board had not authorized any of its public schools to pull those books off the shelves.

Certainly, if I asked, I wasn't going to get a straight answer. Never mind asking. All questions clearly pointed to the same answer, plain and simple: censorship.

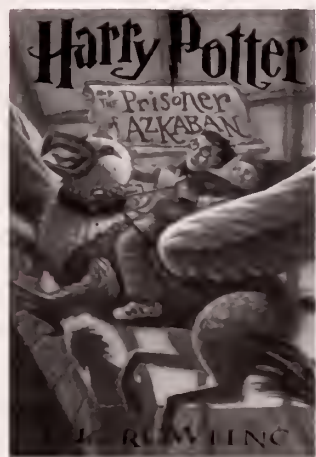
Mrs. Jackson and I looked at each other. I said, "So where are the books?"

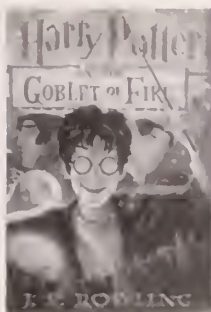
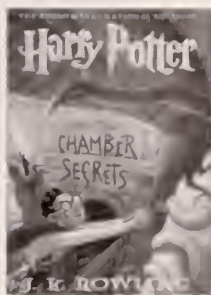
Mrs. Jackson shook her head. "I don't know, Ms. Vidad. But she must have hidden them somewhere good, 'cause even I can't find them myself."

The next morning, I sent an e-mail to the principal stating that I had just learned that the Harry Potter books had been removed from the shelves. I wrote that I had been informed they were "controversial" and that the librarian would be discussing them with the principal. I requested to be included in the conference when it took place.

Mrs. Anderson replied by telling me to plan to meet with her on Friday morning at 8:30. I noticed that she sent the e-mail to the librarian, too.

I was ready. I had done my research, and I had a manila file folder full of notes that expressed my concern about the new librarian. J.K. Rowling's books were not the only ones taken off the shelf, I





discovered. Apparently, she had pulled a number of other books from the shelves with the intention to "DCR" them (otherwise known as discarding). Supposedly, these books were just too old and outdated to remain in the school library. There were four book carts full of rejected books, and when I examined the titles, I couldn't help noticing books on sex education, magic, voodoo and traditional celebrations around the world. I knew that the librarian was a minister's wife, wouldn't decorate the library for Halloween, and had removed Harry Potter from the shelves because religious people were claiming the books were evil. This woman was in a position to control what books were going to be in the library. Considering the books that she had already pulled off the shelves, it was pretty scary to think about the amount of power she had.

At 8:30 on Friday morning, on my way to the principal's office, I ran into Mrs. Anderson herself. She was heading towards her position in the main hall where she supervised students during the forty-five minutes before school began.

"Mrs. Stone isn't in school today," Mrs. Anderson said. "I thought we could meet and talk right here."

Talk right there in the hall while students walked around us and anybody could hear what I had to say? Didn't she realize how serious the situation was? Something was wrong with the picture, but I didn't let myself think too hard about it right then.

"No," I said. "Can we go talk in your office?"

She didn't look too happy. She didn't smile. I tried not to let that bother me and to concentrate on the issue at hand. In her office, I went over my notes. I said that the American Library Association defines censorship as the suppression of ideas and information that certain persons find objectionable and dangerous, and it occurs when expressions such as books (more specifically, J.K. Rowling's books) are removed or kept from public access. I said that not only did the librarian remove Harry Potter from students' access, she was planning to DCR hundreds of books and I was worried about her reasons for wanting to discard them. I said that I thought she shouldn't be making those kinds of decisions.

When I was through, Mrs. Anderson just touched her fingertips together in the shape of a steeple and smiled at me. She said, "Actually, as the librarian, Mrs. Stone has the authority to make decisions that she feels is right for our library."

Instinctively, I clutched the armrests of the chair I sat in. I tried to suppress my gasp and to conceal my horror. It was like finding myself back in that old dream, the one where I am running away from the killer, running away to the only person I trust ... smack into the arms of the bad guy, who turns out to be the one person I thought was my only protection.

That was the end of the discussion. Mrs. Anderson said she would take care of it. She'd talk to the librarian and share my concerns.

In my classroom that afternoon, I received an e-mail from the principal. It was a brief message addressed to the librarian, CC'd to me, and it basically said this: *As a result of my findings, the Harry Potter books should be returned to the shelf*

I went down to the library to see Mrs. Jackson. I wanted her to tell me how many Harry Potter books the school owned. For some reason, I felt uneasy, unsettled. It occurred to me that maybe the librarian burned all of the Harry Potter books in one big, witchcraft-cleansing bonfire. Or at least thrown them away when no one was looking.

At the circulation desk, Mrs. Jackson stopped what she was doing, happy to help me with my request. She typed into the computer, and the book titles by J.K. Rowling appeared on the screen. We stared. Next to each of the four titles, under the number of copies available, the computer records showed that our school library now owned only one book per title. And all four were checked out. The numbers had changed since we last looked at them two days ago. Mrs. Jackson and I couldn't believe it.

There was only one person who could have gone into the computer and altered those numbers.

It was the weekend, but I couldn't ignore what was happening at my school the way I tried to ignore organized groups and their banners and their convictions that Harry Potter taught children to worship the devil. I felt like the rest of the school had a right to know what was going on in our own public school's library. I was afraid of what else would happen if no one drew attention to what the librarian was doing.

I sat down and composed an e-mail to the librarian. I wrote that I was deeply disturbed by her unilateral decision to remove the Harry Potter books from our students' access and that, by taking it upon herself to do so, she was a censor according to the ALA. I wrote that I was troubled that this had gone unnoticed for some time and that I was startled to discover the change in numbers on the computer records. I wrote that I was concerned other titles might have been subjected to censorship and that I was apprehensive about future titles being subjected to her personal biases and prejudices.

What I did next was where I took the flying leap and became, as they say in military terms, airborne: I CC'd the letter to the entire staff, and then I hit *send*.

The shit hit the fan. I knew it was coming, and I wasn't surprised when the principal buzzed my classroom over the intercom on Monday morning to tell me she was sending someone to cover my class and that I was to report to the front office immediately. I wasn't surprised when I walked in and the librarian sat across the principal's desk obviously looking like she had been crying. Anybody else might have said a little prayer, but I didn't. No one was going to save me now.

"Ms. Vidar," Mrs. Anderson began, her voice rising dangerously, "did we not discuss this issue on Friday?"

"Yes," I said.

"And what did I tell you when we discussed this on Friday?" Voice getting louder.

"That you were going to take care of it."

Mrs. Anderson leaned forward and she had the fierce look of someone who was on the verge of losing her temper. "And so why did you feel that you had to send this e-mail to the whole staff? Did you know that it was sent to even the custodial staff?"

Well, yes, as a matter of fact, I did. That was my intention: to let everyone know that they were affected by this, that the librarian was making decisions to get rid of books and that she was calling the shots without anyone else's input. Shouldn't the bookkeeper know that perfectly good money spent by the school was now going to waste? Shouldn't the guidance counselor who taught a reading class be informed that the book she wanted to read to her students was a book that the librarian didn't see fit for the shelves? Shouldn't the custodians who were in charge of sending discarded items to the county warehouse be aware that among those items were books that the librarian had pulled out of our library's circulation? Yes, I knew that my e-mail

would be sent to and read by everyone at the school, including the custodial staff.

"I thought that the school had a right to know," I said.

She let me have it. Later, people said that she was so loud, her voice could be heard in the front office. I felt like a kid being yelled at in the principal's office—and even when I was a kid, I had never been yelled at in the principal's office. "You know, this reflects on me. I told you that I would take care of it, and you went over my head and did this ..." She went on about cliques in the school and how she wasn't going to have any of it, about how I was letting emotions get involved. I gathered she meant that I was being emotional in sending my e-mail, and that my action was creating cliques of supporters, either for me or for the librarian. All I could do was nod, blink and watch my principal reprimand me. And take note of the way she was getting all worked up as she talked about not letting emotions get involved in a situation.

"Mrs. Stone made a mistake," Mrs. Anderson continued, "just as you made a mistake in sending that e-mail to the whole staff."

As if sending an e-mail to the whole staff to make them aware of censorship within our public school was equivalent to the librarian removing material that she found objectionable and withholding them from our students' access.

"I wish you had come and talked to me about it first," Mrs. Stone said, looking and sounding as if I had twisted a knife in her back. She was doing an excellent job of portraying the part of injured and wronged victim.

Mrs. Anderson said, "While you two are discussing this, I'm going to take care of that e-mail." She turned to her computer and typed out a new message. Later I discovered what it stated: she had taken care of the situation and that in the future, no one could send an e-mail to the whole staff without getting her approval first. I could take full responsibility for causing that new decree.

I turned to Mrs. Stone. "I was concerned and surprised to find that the numbers on the computer changed. We went from having multiple copies of the books to having just one of each."

She looked right back at me and replied, "Did you come and talk to me about it first? Did you ask me about it? Did you wait until I got back to school on Monday? Couldn't you wait to talk to me in person, instead of sending an e-mail to the whole staff?"

Now I was the guilty party.

I quit talking. It was no use. There is no point in trying to argue with someone who doesn't acknowledge anything you say. For that person, there is only one voice that matters, and yours is not the higher power.

I had offended both the librarian and my principal, and censorship wasn't the issue anymore.

People were talking all over the school, and my principal didn't like it. The next day, I was called into her office again.

She got right to the point when I sat down. "How are you responding to people when they come up to you and ask about this?"

Since it was the beginning of second period and so far I had only dealt with students, I could safely say that I hadn't spoken to anybody about it yet.

Judging by the expression on her face, I couldn't tell if she believed me. She said, "When people want to talk to you about what is going on, here is what I want you to say. You were wrong in going over my head and sending that e-mail without my approval."

I sat there and blinked. I looked at her. I tried to absorb the fact that she had just said, "Here is what I want you to say." I tried to believe what my ears had just heard. I said, "I understand that I upset you by sending that e-mail, and I didn't mean to undermine your authority. But the issue here is censorship, and I felt that everyone had a right to know."

She looked down at her phone as if she were going to pick it up and make a phone call right then. She said, "I can tell that you still have strong feelings about this. Now, I haven't written a letter about what you did, I didn't put anything in your employee file ... However, I do have a copy of your e-mail, and if you continue with ... in pursuing this, then I may have to go to the area superintendent to discuss this matter and what you have done."

I looked her right in the eye, and she wasn't prepared for what I said next. "Well, if you go to the area superintendent, then can I go, too, and discuss how what I can and can't say is being monitored?"

I could almost feel her eyes roll back as she did a double take. But she regained her composure fast. "From now on," she said, "let me take care of this. If you have any problems or concerns, you come directly to me."

At that moment, as I sat in the principal's office and looked across her desk, it became very clear to me what was happening. I saw the higher power. She meant for the issue to remain behind closed doors, and I was feeling the slam of the door in my face.

That week, the librarian returned eight Harry Potter books to the shelf. As soon as the books were restored to their rightful place, students were checking them out. One of my students returned with a thick volume. He was unaware of what had transpired, of the trouble I'd gone through, but he said with a degree of satisfaction, "Finally, they're back on the shelf!"

Several people came up to me or sent e-mails saying that they supported me and what I had done. One woman said, "I knew there were rumors. But you were the only person who did anything about it."

Then there were the people who couldn't make eye contact with me when I passed them in the halls. I knew they were probably the same ones who were going into the library and apologizing to the librarian for what I had done. I received an e-mail from one teacher who said she never had any problems with me before, so she couldn't believe that I had sent an e-mail publicly—"slamming" the librarian. It was a fine example of passive-aggressive behavior in writing.

But the woman's condemnation of my actions merely exemplified what the situation had become. It reminded me of a time not too long ago, when the United States bombed a pharmaceutical plant in Sudan, and all the country could talk about was how our president had gotten a blow job. In any controversial issue, people will assign the priority in which they choose to view matters and, generally, people will focus on the petty problems—trivial things like a blow job or gossip among school employees. It's easier to talk about how our president was cheating on his wife or how Ms. Vidad publicly slammed the poor school librarian. The serious, societal problems like bombing or censorship are forgotten, and the real victims are neglected. The general public will overlook the fact that a bombing kills people, or that censorship takes away a child's freedom and power to read what he or she wants to read. Somehow, those issues become the less important ones; somehow, those people do not become the focus of attention. In my case, I am the one people talk about. I am either a saint or the devil's advocate, depending on how you look at it. Or what your religion might tell you.

On my way home from work every day, I drive past the Merritt Island Baptist Church again. The banner attacking Harry Potter has been taken down, and so far no other banners have been put up to replace it. But that doesn't mean the militant religious book censors have all disappeared.

I check every day. I look to the church. And I come up empty. ★

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-Clamor Magazine

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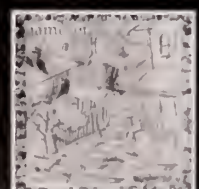


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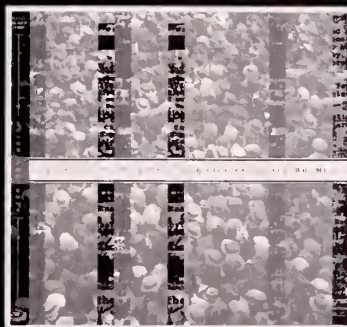
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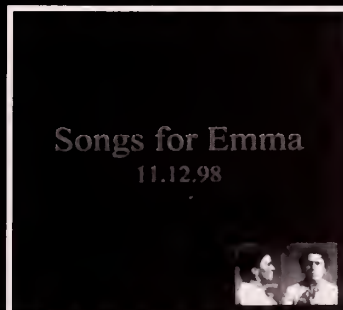
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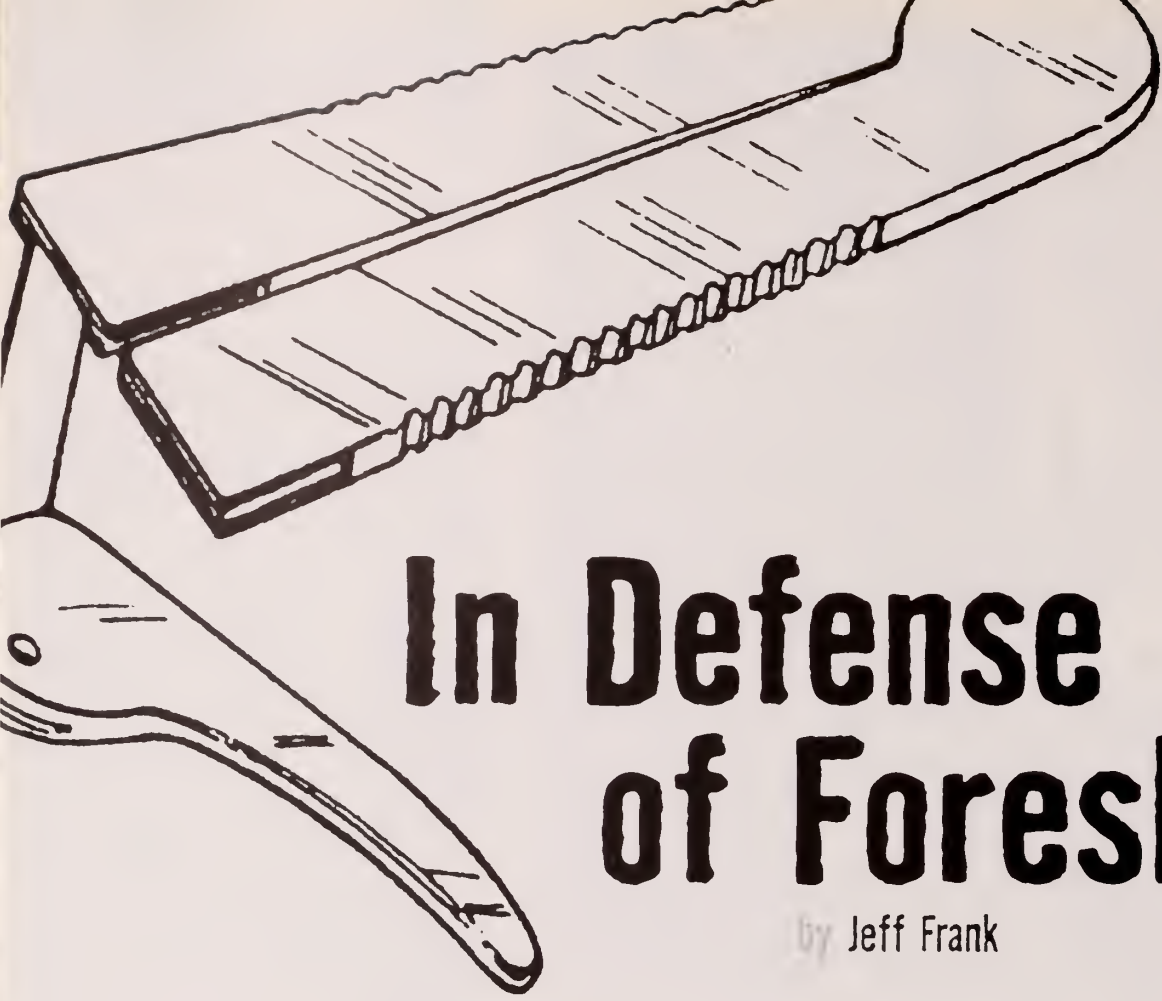
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In Defense of Foreskin

by Jeff Frank

Male circumcision has been practiced as a religious rite for thousands of years, as well as in primitive and tribal rituals. Most boys circumcised in America, unlike the rest of the worlds, are being cut for social reasons as opposed to religious beliefs or affiliations.

There is much controversy regarding the risks and benefits of circumcision among the health care community. I am writing this to spread information and raise questions. This is a reflection of my own opinions as well as a mixture of academic sources. It is an important topic due to the lack of knowledge or discussion about circumcision. Because of this, many parents fail to question this procedure.

Although I am a Jewish male, I was not circumcised in the traditional manner. In the Jewish practice, the ceremony is performed in the home with the baby sitting on the father's lap. My parents decided to go the more mainstream route, taking care of it in the hospital.

If as a tradition a family chooses to follow certain customs and rituals, it would be my imagination that they would truly believe in what they are living, by therefore, acting accordingly. The procedure would then be carried out in a religious manner as opposed to the medical or social influence.

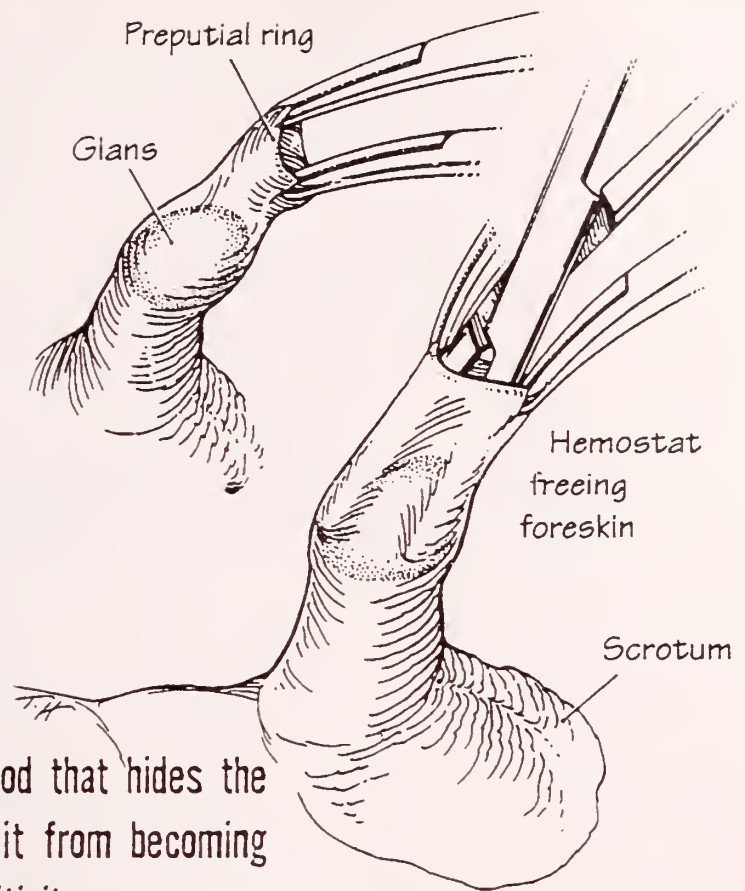
Circumcision, as mentioned in the Bible, was used as a distinction mark to show the difference between Jews and Egyptians. The procedure was originally described in Jewish tradition as cutting only the outer foreskin and removing the tip, hence preserving the inner lining (bris mitah). The medical procedure practiced today is done using clamps that crush and excise the tissue of the prepuce, removing the foreskin down to the base of the glans.

In western history, male genital surgery began in the late 1800s to prevent masturbation which was thought of as an illness. People believed that masturbation lead to blindness, disease and insanity. It was feared that young boys beginning puberty would pull back their foreskin while cleaning themselves, thus learning how to masturbate. So, to eliminate the problem, it became a common practice to cut off the foreskin of newly born males.

As the ideas of cleanliness grew throughout the twentieth century, dirt and lack of self care became signs of moral failure or social hazard. Circumcision became an answer to all male health problems. At one point, the uncircumcised penis was considered a symbol of the lower class because of the cost of the procedure. The penis was then considered "dirty."

Today, the United States is the only nation in the world that continues to practice routine non-religious circumcision at such a high rate. The practice reached its peak in the US in the 1960s and '70s when 85 to 90 percent of all males were circumcised. The annual cost of circumcision in the US during this time was estimated at \$200 million.

Since that time, the rate of circumcision has slowed. One probable factor in this is that many insurance companies will no longer cover the costs, viewing it as a cosmetic surgery with no valid medical purpose. Britain's national health system has also removed circumcision from their list of medically covered services for the same reason. However, that doesn't keep some doctors from still claiming medical justifications for the practice, with statements that circumcision can reduce the tendencies of contracting urinary-tract infections, venereal disease and even prevent HIV infection.



The foreskin is actually a protective hood that hides the glans, keeping it warm and protecting it from becoming dry, thick, and hard, thereby losing sensitivity.

Many of these claims have been proven wrong: one study showed that more than 95 percent of male children never experience urinary-tract infections, regardless of the presence of a foreskin or not. In another study done on HIV infected men in Los Angeles, Miami, San Francisco and New York, 60 to 90 percent had been circumcised at birth. As long ago as 1971, a study done by the American College of Pediatrics stated that "There is no valid medical indication for circumcision in the newborn." Shortly thereafter, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists took a stand against routine circumcision. Thus, in the past two decades the rate of circumcision has been on a steady decline, yet today, 40 to 60 percent of baby boys receive this painful surgical procedure.

One of the reasons that keeps the practice of circumcision routine is the fact that parents view the surgery as harmless. Many doctors and religious figures insist that this procedure is painless for the newborn baby. I would advise anyone facing this question with doubts to attend a circumcision and create your own opinions. Medical studies do show a rise in heart rate and intense crying, evidence that the procedure is physically painful as well as psychologically stressful. Circumcision is performed without the presence of anesthesia due to the potential affects it can have on the newborn.

In many recent studies of neonatal consciousness, it has been found that newborns show great signs of awareness. It has also been pointed out that taking a newborn child from one extreme environment to another can leave the child's system shocked. So, shortly after the intense experience of birth, a baby boy's penis is then touched by a nurse as he is cleaned for genital surgery. This could lead to the baby's

first erection or sexual experience. Soon after, the baby experiences severe pain. The juxtaposition of this procedure may have a direct relation to some circumcised men's general lack of trust and security in relationships, and experiencing specific anxiety in sexual relationships.

Medically, circumcision is not a risk-free procedure. Potential complications include infection, hemorrhage, gangrene, septicemia, and ulceration of exposed urinary meatus (opening). If the baby is premature or suffering from blood problems, congenital abnormalities, or an illness at birth, he should not be immediately circumcised. It is a procedure that doctors willingly note should only be performed on healthy infants.

All of this pain and expense is over the removal of the foreskin. The foreskin is actually a protective hood that hides the glans, keeping it warm and protecting it from becoming dry, thick, and hard, thereby losing sensitivity. In early years, it protects from feces, urine, and diaper irritation. In older years, this layer of skin will protect from zippers, fingernails, and burns. The foreskin is also laden with sensitive nerve endings which enhance a sexual experience.

Due to the nature of the foreskin as a protective covering in an unclean environment, the foreskin can provide an attractive breeding place for infection. But having a foreskin can be healthy and clean. Today the infection rate is reported to be 14 percent in the uncircumcised male and 8 percent in the circumcised — a minor difference.

Many parents question the humiliation their child may undergo as an uncircumcised male. Parents are also concerned that their children

will feel that they "don't look like daddy." This fear can be overcome with more communication as well as more information. Approximately 80 percent of the world's male population remains uncircumcised. The amount of intact males in the US continues to rise; in 1986, about 45 percent of all male newborns left the hospital carrying the same package they were given. This means almost half of teenage boys in today's locker rooms will look naturally different.

In conclusion, I feel we must break this routine of silently observing and following medical tradition. Parents should be informed of these issues by their health care providers. Many parents simply follow the status quo, allowing it to dictate their child's future. As parents, and responsible human beings, we must recognize how these actions are affecting the lives of our children. We must educate ourselves on these issues and question medical and religious procedures.

We must educate ourselves, both men and women, on issues pertaining to our general health and maintenance of our bodies. For that is just one outlook or philosophy medicine that seems to treat our natural bodies as something that needs to be fixed. Or cut off.

Sources and Suggested readings:

National Organization of Circumcision Information Center: P.O. Box 2512; San Anselmo, CA 94960; 415-488-9883

The American Academy of Pediatrics
Steven P. Shelov, M.D.
Bantam Books

Out in the Open
R. Louis Schultz
North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, California

Varney's Midwifery
Henry Varney
Jones and Barlett Publisher; Sudbury, Mass.

The Male Herbal
James Green, Herbalist
The Crossing Press, Freedom, CA

FORESKIN RESTORATION

by Jen Angel

With the debate over circumcision comes a discussion of "foreskin restoration." Men who were circumcised as babies and aren't content as they are, can now consider the following options:

Surgical foreskin restoration:

Though there are surgical methods for reconstruction, there is debate over the success of such procedures. Some regard the procedures as prone to complications, or feel that the intended result is not reached. There are various methods, including extending the skin of the shaft through a circular cut near the head of the penis, and by using loose skin from the scrotum in different forms of a skin graft. Many surgeons who perform this kind of operation require the patients to complete psychological testing prior to any procedure.

Nonsurgical foreskin restoration.

Based on the principle that skin can expand and adapt, some people believe that men can "encourage" a foreskin-like covering of the glans through nonsurgical, self-applied techniques. Can human skin really do this? When a person gains or loses weight, over time their skin will shrink or expand, without losing thickness.

Self restoration processes, though they vary slightly, usually involves pulling the skin of the shaft forward gently, and holding the skin in place with medical tape. This self-restoration can take 1 to 3 years, depending the amount of skin to be restored, the size of the penis, and as well as a person's dedication to the process. The National Organization of Restoring Men advocates this method and considers it a "safe" method — free from complications or risk of infection that surgical restoration may offer.

Why do men do this? Some men feel that it increases sensitivity of the glans and increased sexual pleasure. Others believe that the foreskin protects the head of the penis. The British Journal of Urology published a paper by O'Hara and O'Hara which said, "In heterosexual intercourse, the nonabrasive gliding of the penis in and out of itself within the vagina facilitates smooth and pleasurable intercourse for both partners. Without this gliding action, the corona of the circumcised penis can function as a one-way valve, dragging vaginal lubricants out into the drying air and making artificial lubricants essential for non-painful intercourse." And, after all, some men believe that an uncircumcised penis is more attractive.

For further information:

NORM (National Organization of Restoring Men)
3205 Northwood Dr., suite 209, Concord, CA 94520
phone: (510) 827-4077

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A One-Handed Read

On Our Backs: The Best Erotic Fiction

edited by Lindsay McClune.

Alyson Publications, 2001

www.alysn.com

This anthology collects the best of the best short erotic fiction appearing between 1984 and 2001 in the lesbian sex mag *On Our Backs*. The list of contributors featured in this book is a who's who of lesbian writers, including Jewelle Gomez ("A Piece of Time"), Dorothy Allison ("An Exploration"), Joan Nestle ("My Woman Poppa"), and Red Jordan Arobateau ("Cum E-Z"). In her introduction, editor Lindsay McClune (former associate editor of the magazine) explains that *On Our Backs* has always looked for "stories that are, firstly and most important, well written... stories that have explicit (and erotic/pornographic) sex in them..." Each of these 36 stories satisfies both requirements. From gettin' it on in the library ("Sex in the Stacks" by Wendy Hill) to doing it in a park ("The Strength of Trees" by Anna Svahn), from barrel racers ("Cowpoke" by Mary Tidbits) to florists ("Flowergirl" by Kirsten Flounoy), from science fiction ("Loved I Not Honor More" by Rebecca Ripley and "Whips and Appendages" by Mil Toro) to punk rock ("Computer Blue" by Mickey Warnock) there is sure to be something in this book to please any lusty lady who wants to read about hot sex among women. Some stories are sweet — Lee Lynch's "Cactus Love" about two older lesbians who find each other — and some are downright raunchy — Dot Cogdell's "December 25th Uncensored," a tale of the unorthodox holiday celebration of two tough dykes — but none are boring. Included in this collection is "Still Life With Dildo" by K. Munro, possibly the most tightly written and realistic, yet still enticing, story about getting picked up by and going home with a stranger from the bar. This sexy collection is sure to be a popular addition to the women lovin' women erotica genre.

-Chantel C. Guidry

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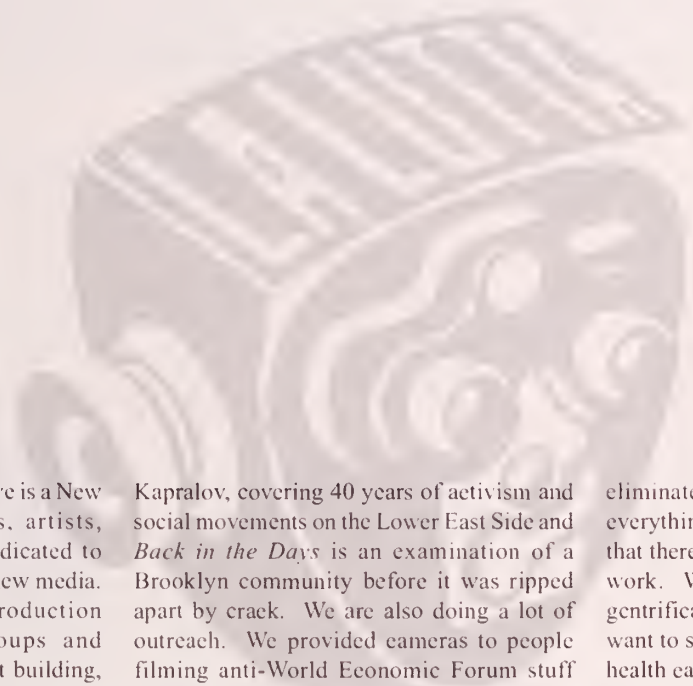
CHALLENGING REPRESENTATION

La Lutta New Media Collective

an interview with co-founder Antonino D'Amborosio

by Rachael Rakes

above: co-founder Kevin Ryan during filming of "Back in the Days" documentary filmed in East Flatbush, Brooklyn



La Lutta New Media Collective is a New York-based group of activists, artists, educators, and rabble-rousers dedicated to raising social awareness through new media. By providing technical and production assistance to community groups and individuals involved in movement building, information sharing, social justice, and human rights, they aim to empower those people and communities who are more often harmed rather than helped by new technology. They offer assistance in the form of Web site development, information system support and implementation, digital film and documentary production, and organizing performances, events, and gatherings in efforts to build communication centers for information exchange and movement building. La Lutta (the name comes from *La Lotta*, meaning "the struggle" in Italian) is now in their fifth year of operation.

Antonino D'Ambrosio is one of the co-founders of La Lutta NMC; I spoke with him over many long-distance, long-running phone conversations about La Lutta and the meaning of integration:

Clamor: What's going on right now, what projects is La Lutta working on?

We have this big visual arts arm to the organization. With that, we're working on two documentaries: *Once There was a Village* is based on a book by artist/activist Yuri

Kapralov, covering 40 years of activism and social movements on the Lower East Side and *Back in the Days* is an examination of a Brooklyn community before it was ripped apart by crack. We are also doing a lot of outreach. We provided cameras to people filming anti-World Economic Forum stuff recently.

What other groups have you been working with?

We support a lot of local grassroots organizations here in New York. We lend our cameras and provide technical support to housing rights and anti-gentrification groups and work with younger people teaching them how to shoot and edit film. Sometimes the communities may have something specific in mind to do with the film, like a documentary or archiving, but we will also use some of their stuff in our projects. We also provide a space to display the different organizations' projects at the events we throw.

This is a Movement is a series of community events and conferences where different groups involved with La Lutta collaborate and showcase their work. Some of the younger activists we work with have given spoken word performances or shown their films at other events and benefits we put together. Our goal in this is to integrate all the different projects into a larger collaborative project. We're trying to

eliminate these situations that arise where everything is so fragmented to try to show that there are so many connections in all this work. We think that the work these anti-gentrification groups are doing is great, but want to show that it's likely connected to the health care program around the corner in the same community. We understand those connections and bring them together through media projects, such as film.

Why Film?

Film to me is like technology: I have a love hate relationship with it. Like technology, it often separates us more than brings us together and only promotes the agendas of a small, exclusive group of people. It's also expensive and highly technical. We're trying to take that convention and turn it on its head using the tools of the oppressor. We're taking the understanding that film and television are how most people get their information and using it to reach and influence as many people as we can. Through film documentation we create a historical record of things we think are important. There's such a revisionist approach to the problems around us. Hardly anyone is preserving memory and in the mainstream media there's even a great effort to create a climate of constantly forgetting. All the film projects in production right now are historical. *Once There was a Village* remembers an artist and working class

community before gentrification took over and *Back in the Days* remembers a community before it was overrun by crack. This March we will be going to Cuba for the Tear Down the Walls conference to film it and create the visual world history that as soon as Castro dies will effectively be wiped away. Another film project we're starting work on, called *America is a Day*, approaches the lack of memory in this country head on.

Explain the concept of America is a Day.

America is a Day aims to show the chronic lack of memory in this country and how conscious and malevolent that amnesia is. Examining how Americans live day in and day out demonstrates how de-politicized people are, how unable people are to contextualize what goes on around them. What we want to do try to get a cross-section of people who work, follow them around (ideally people will film themselves) for a couple weeks. Then after the few weeks are over we will get them together to interact and show parts of the films. With everyone together we will bring up specific things from the films that might create an interesting discourse where people talk about their experience, about what people see in their relationships, and what that means in terms of how people live. There are all these issues day in and day out that come up and people don't know what to do with them. One interesting thing about September 11 is that people were forced to have discussion of sophisticated complex political issues in a really uninformed way — in a really simplistic way. It showed that people have no way to process what goes on and that comes out in day to day interactions.

Creating context by preserving memory.

America is a day.

I know that's one of La Lutta's slogans, of which you have many. You seem to use a specific language and terminology on the site and in your press. What is the thinking behind that?

I started understanding the influence of slogans from my own experience being politicized early on through punk rock. Seeing Joe Strummer wearing a Red Brigades T-shirt turned me on to the Italian Anarchist movement, something I might have never stumbled onto. The punk scene was very effective as a movement that way. I think the Situationists were also very effective in their creation of new words and intriguing propaganda. Slogans are visceral, short, intense, and accessible. They have shown already to pique people's interest in our

organization. People ask all the time what the term La Lutta means; that becomes an opportunity to inform people about our organization.

Do you consider yourselves an Anarchist group?

Not overtly. We are trying to stay away from any labels to reach as many people as possible. We realize that what you do and how you act is intrinsically political and are trying to stay away from wearing our politics on our sleeves — trying to counteract all the fractionalization that goes on in "the left" because of miniscule political differences. The main purpose of La Lutta is to provide solidarity in the struggle. People call us Anarchists for that.

You've been around for about five years now, how has the organization changed and what have you learned about this kind of activism?

My idea when we first started La Lutta was we have some skills: I can make films, I have a grasp on technology. I've had some opportunities and advantages. Why don't we start this organization that offers our skills to the community; we have the benefit of our experience to bring people together. We wanted to show that skills like these can be used for more than making money. We wanted to be a resource where people could call us for extremely varying kinds of issues and, at first, overextended our resources a little. You have to recognize where to place your energies. In the beginning we would get caught up with "left" groups who would monopolize our time, clearly because they thought their issue was more important than some of the other groups' we were assisting.

I call this the "sandbox mentality" so prevalent in the left. All these groups have their corner of the sandbox, only worrying about the castles they're building. They forget that the sand is owned by someone else. We decided to concentrate on projects that are really achievable like *Dispatch*, our on-line writing and news journal. We give people the opportunity to contribute writing and if they do the work, they can become an active member of the Dispatch collective. The collective then changes form by the members in it and the work they are interested in. The infrastructure is set up to help people do what they want to do, what they love to do.

That's something very radical in itself.

Definitely. When people see that something is working, that they are getting done something they want to do, that can have a huge impact — on individuals as well as whole communities.

La Lutta's Website is www.lalutta.org



Yuri Kapralov captured during filming of "Once There Was A Village" documentary of Lower East Side, NYC



above: Maria Benfield of Video Machete

Youth Seize Power with Technology

by Kari Lydersen

Digital video cameras. iMacs. Editing machines. CD burners and software. Internet servers. Radio antennas and transmitters.

While the youth of the '60s had love beads, natural fibers, and sandals to proclaim their revolution, many teen-agers (and even younger kids) today have high tech multi-media equipment and the knowledge of how to use it as their tools for empowerment, self-expression, and social change. Ten-year-olds are easily mastering computer and media technologies that didn't exist a decade ago. And between the relatively more affordable prices of computers, cameras, and other technology and the existence of DIY collectives and grassroots non-profit organizations, youth from a wide range of backgrounds now have access to high tech media tools and the information superhighway. Shooting a video, designing a Web site, or pirating software might not seem like an overt way to overthrow capitalism or fight for human rights. And for most people it isn't. But it is a way that youth, including youth from low-income communities and so-called "at risk" backgrounds, are gaining economic freedom and making their voices heard in a society that would often prefer not to hear them.

Street Level Youth Media

At two long-running media organizations in Chicago, Street Level Youth Media and Video Machete, kids, teenagers, and young adults learn computer, video, and other technology skills with a popular education focus that includes a heavy dose of political and social analysis.

At Street Level, about 800 youth ages 8 to 22 utilize two drop-in centers on the north and near west sides of the city where they have access to top of the line computers and video equipment. Street Level offers a wide range of computer classes as well as teaching youth to write and shoot and edit videos. Every year Street Level holds a massive media "Block Party" in which students' videos and electronic media projects are shown on banks of TVs and screens surreally arranged in parks or other public spaces. The videos, glowing on the monitors to a background of electronic music, include comedies, music videos, and political commentaries. The topics range from sexuality to gossip to family to police brutality.

Edda Meza, 20, who has been coming to Street Level for years and gained a scholarship to Columbia College through the program, made a video for one block party about people's perspectives of "What

is Ghetto." "It means a slum area," she explained. "And it also means slang for improvising, like if you iron something on the floor - that's ghetto." Meza also worked on a video about teen-agers being stereotyped called "Misunderstood." "People judge our outer appearance without even knowing who we are," she noted.

In the videos girls talk about the way boys disrespect them, Latinos talk about what their culture and family means to them, and African-Americans talk about being criminalized and beaten by police.

"We're about media literacy and education for young people, their role in creating their own images of themselves," said Andres Hernandez, 28, director of the Street Level drop-in center. "This gives the youth a way of combating stereotypes," comments Hernandez, "especially of young people in minority and low-income communities. Youth are bombarded with so much imagery, most of it negative. We want to combat that and be able to navigate the imagery and deconstruct the hidden messages in TV, advertising, the Internet. We also want to keep them in touch with technology and show how these can be tools for them to take control of their lives."

Along with computer classes and video production, youth at Street Level participate in informal and structured discussion and arts groups. There is a Girls' Group, for example, where girls have a safe and supportive space to talk about sexuality, feminism, friendship, and anything else. A space in the back computer room is cordoned off with a shower curtain. This is a "girls' haven" where girls can go in and speak to a video camera, either anonymously or with their face shown, recording for perpetuity whatever is on their mind. After the September 11 attacks, the girls' haven was temporarily transformed into a mobile "peace haven" for people to talk about their reactions and fears in the wake of the attacks. In the future, according to coordinator Rivka Sadarangani, they are planning to move the haven to different public places to invite widespread participation.

In addition to creating their own media outlets, Street Level participants have inserted their work into mainstream media. Among other things, Street Level youth made videos for a permanent exhibit at the Chicago Historical Society about changing neighborhoods and gentrification. James Duke, 21, worked on a documentary for the Historical Society as well as a piece called "Origins" that aired on public television. "We had a bunch of us talking about what our origins are, how this big earth got started," he said.

The Street Level space is decorated with graffiti murals, photo collages, anti-gun posters, and other artwork done by students.

"Big themes are hip-hop and anti-violence and the role hip-hop plays in communities as an alternative to violence," said Sadarangani, noting that Street Level often works with local youth activist groups such as Generation Y and the Southwest Youth Collaborative. "We're very concerned about issues that affect young people, we provide a forum for youth to speak about issues if they choose to do so."

For many, their work at Street Level does have overtly political themes and messages addressing gentrification, racism, justice, police brutality, and other weighty topics. For others, video, web design, Photo Shop, or whatever other programs they are learning are a form of self-expression and a positive way to spend their free time. And for many, the self-proclaimed "Neutral Space" at Street Level is a literal haven from gang activity in surrounding neighborhoods. "This is a great place to come after school and everything is free," said Chris Rios, 12. "I've introduced a lot of my friends to this place."

Video Machete

Video Machete, another Chicago non-profit youth media program, grew directly out of anti-gang initiatives. Several young adults who worked as youth advocates and activists were disturbed by the combination of criminalization of youth and rampant gang violence in their neighborhoods. They decided to address these issues through a media project where youth on opposing sides of gang lines could speak to the camera about their perspective. "We started doing a documentary with

a group of gang-affiliated youth, calling the group 'Youth Struggling for Survival,'" said Maria Benfield, 37, one of the founders of the program which started in 1994. "It ended up being about 15 tapes and just spun out into other projects from that," said Benfield.

From meeting in members' houses, the group grew and in 1998 incorporated as a non-profit organization. Today there are about 50 youth ages 5 to 25 who are involved on a regular basis. There are 22 active collective members, half of them youth. "We started feeling like there was a way we could raise money to pay youth to do media work, and have a really democratic and diverse organization with youth in leadership roles," said Benfield. "We have a popular education approach where we hope we learn as much from each participant as they learn from us. Media is how we promote dialogue."

From the start, the focus of the group was on education and analysis as a way to explore and express political and social issues. "When Video Machete was founded it was trying to be an alternative space to the other arts and social service organizations that were out there," said Tammy Ko Robinson, 26, a collective member who has done pirate radio and other media work. "We're not just technically based," notes Robinson, "but we combine community-based work

with technical skills. Sometimes we might be working in a school or something where we won't have cameras. So then we'll use movement or words or whatever expression we can."

Currently the group has several ongoing projects that provoke youth to analyze and educate themselves and others on certain topics and to create videos and other media projects as ongoing results of

those analyses. One current project is collecting oral histories of Latinos throughout the city for a documentary touching on issues of culture, first and second generation immigrants, bilingual education, arts, and other topics.

Another initiative is called Queer MAGIK (originally MAGIK, Media Activism for Girls in the Know) where queer and transgender youth talk about sexuality and the issues affecting them. Recently Queer MAGIK hosted a drag ball at a local gallery and was featured in an insert in *Windy City Times*, one of the city's main queer papers. Among other video projects, they interviewed youth at the Pride Parade last summer.

A third current focus is the Global Youth program which, according to Benfield, looks "at globalization and how it affects youth in particular." "We're bringing together immigrant youth to talk to each other," said Benfield, "and encouraging self-reflection and looking at the larger picture." Through a grant, youth collective members are conducting Global Youth workshops at a magnet high school and at an alternative high school. Members also enter their videos in various film festivals and competitions. After the September 11 attacks, Video Machete's "Experimental TV" program produced five public service announcements about tolerance, racism, and peace for CAN-TV, Chicago's public access cable station. The PSAs may show at several film festivals including *Sundance*. "You were seeing all these patriotic, 'Go Army' commercials," said Robinson. "At the time there was no alternative. We were responding to that."



James Duke (top) and Chris Rios of Street Level Media

Strive Media Institute

On TV stations in Wisconsin, viewers of sitcoms or reality shows occasionally are snapped out of their reveries by a commercial that is a bit out of the ordinary. In this commercial, a multi-racial group of teens physically accost a suit-wearing, sheepish-looking white man representing "Big Tobacco" and end up tearing his clothes off, mocking and threatening him as he lies on the ground. In the provocative, colorful TV spot, the teens shout that they don't buy the man's promise that tobacco companies are not marketing to youth. "We know the facts!" says one boy, punching a fist with the word FACTS on his knuckles toward the camera.

The FACTS commercial, funded by the state-mandated anti-tobacco campaign, is produced by the Milwaukee-based Strive Media Institute, a multi-dimensional media program aimed at increasing youth representation and diversity in media around the country. In addition to producing ads for FACTS, about 40 Strive youth members produce a high quality, full-color teen entertainment and cultural magazine called *Gumbo*, a TV talk show called *Teen Forum*, a *Gumbo* TV project, a Web design program called TechKnow Solutions, and other print and electronic media projects. Both the magazine and TV projects address teen sexuality, race and culture, political and

educational issues, and other hard-hitting topics from the youths' perspectives. A recent Teen Forum segment, for example, focused on homelessness with field shots of homeless people, man-on-the-street interviews about people's opinions of the homeless, and a talk show-style discussion where teens discussed the reasons for homelessness and how the problem could be solved.

Grassroots Tech

While Street Level, Video Machete, and Strive have become somewhat institutionalized and take advantage of major grant and funding possibilities (while maintaining a grassroots approach), youth are also utilizing media and computer technology for many other projects that have no directors or funding. Many teen-agers around the country broadcast at pirate radio stations, "liberating" the airwaves for political dialogue, community news, and indie music. Young activists contribute to Indymedia Web sites around the world with video, audio, writing, and photos from anti-globalization or anti-police brutality protests, labor strikes, and anti-racist actions.

And, the many youth who are video game and computer whizzes may not be using these skills for overtly political aims but they are

nonetheless bucking the established system by creating their own access to the world of information technology, developing skills that can get them relatively well-paying and flexible jobs at tech firms, and finding avenues for artistic and political expression. Whether it is hacking into government computer systems, pirating music and software to sell or give to friends, or creating their own web pages, video games, movies, or graphic design companies, youth are using technology to create alternatives to the mainstream system and claim power, autonomy, and expression.

For example, Victor Kimble, a student at Bronzeville Academy alternative high school in Chicago, has created a video game and comic book company with a friend. "We started our comics a long time ago, when I was 11 and Chris was 13," said Kimble in an article in *The Residents' Journal* newspaper. "Eclipse is just one of the newest and latest characters in a company known as Crossbone Comics that we created," Kimble explains. "Eclipse is ranked number one in the comic and his abilities are outstanding. He has the power to absorb power from other characters and to heal himself and others. Eclipse and the other characters are shown on a Web site that we created. Chris and I hope to soon be entrepreneurs and give you the best comics, cartoons, movies, clothing and anything else. Our dream still lives on." ★

VIDEO REVIEW

Boom - The Sound of Eviction

Produced by Whispered Media
www.whisperedmedia.org

Anti-globalization activists have long linked new patterns of global concentrations of capital to intensified harm visited on local populations. Indigenous farmers in Southern Mexico are dislocated by IMF/WB-imposed policies that eliminated constitutional rights to land. Jamaican dairy farmers pour their milk onto the ground as cheaper-priced US-made milk floods the Jamaican market. Filipina "overseas contract workers," working as domestic servants, remit their paychecks to a debt-ridden country from places as far away as Hong Kong, Japan, the US, and Kuwait. Colombian trade unionists are attacked by US-trained paramilitary thugs in order to protect the profits of US-based multinational oil and energy companies.

These kinds of globalization-induced hardships have not escaped people living in the US. Similar problems in the US, with its large economy of which so many of the world's poor people are supposed to be "jealous," afflict working-class populations, often of color. In the US, privatization, de-industrialization, corruption of super-wealthy and politically influential companies such as Enron, and gentrification of urban areas are key features of this "new economy."

Boom - The Sound of an Eviction, a feature-length documentary, tells the story of how globalization worked on local working-class people in San Francisco. In the late 1990s, San Francisco was the site of an enormous boom in the Internet-computer industry. As one activist in the film states, \$20 billion dollars were invested globally in venture capital in 1999 and \$7.5 billion went to San Francisco for Internet-related technology developments. The

speculative bubble in "dot-coms" (soon to burst as big corporations consolidated control over the technology and communications industries) also spread to the real estate market. Newly arrived corporate investors, businesses, and entrepreneurs looking for housing and office space helped to raise real estate costs through the roof, so to speak.

It also became fashionable for conspicuous consumers to move into historic districts such as the Mission District, which at the time housed Latino/a working-class people, a thriving community of "starving" artists, many seniors, and non-profit organizations. This migration raised rents on housing and office space as well as elevated the "status" of the neighborhood, influencing many landlords to expel undesirable elements—especially working-class Latinos/as in order to accommodate the taste of mostly white corporate investors and technology entrepreneurs. As one anti-gentrification advocate in the film remarks, "good" and "bad" in reference to neighborhoods usually indicates class and racial differences, but all people deserve affordable housing and livable wages.

One Asian American US postal worker moonlighting as a hotel "doorman" interviewed by the filmmakers says, "I'm a postman, but I still can't afford to live in San Francisco." Many of the people who find themselves unable to pay high rents are seniors without financial recourse or without

alternative housing situations. The effects generally have been devastating: since 1996, evictions in San Francisco have tripled; 169 homeless people died on the streets of San Francisco in 1999 alone; since 1995, the median rent for a two bedroom apartment has doubled to over \$2500; while landlords' profits on rents has increased by \$1.3 billion dollars since 1995.

Boom also documents the formation of many coalitions and organizations composed of whites and people of color, of working-class residents of the district and other areas, of artists, of politicians, and of students. It uses still and live pictures of demonstrations, confrontations, creative protests, and festivals used to develop the message and unity of the people opposed to gentrification. As one Latina activist in the film says, "we keep coming through, we keep on pushing ... for social justice." This is Boom's best feature. It records the

activities of those punished by the system for not being rich.

Activists in other areas may gain ideas and insight on tactics and methods by viewing this film. Though perhaps a bit lengthy, requiring some patience, the film successfully presents the argument that quality housing is a human right, and the system, as it stands, cannot or refuses to provide for millions of people in the US.

-Joel Wendland



Black Hawk Down: American Intervention Through a Celluloid Filter

by Thomas Clavin

The blood-soaked sand of Afghanistan is fertile ground for the entertainment industry. There's nothing like a good war to bring people flocking to theaters for their 90-minute fix of honor and glory. But in the case of the graphic thriller *Black Hawk Down*, based on Mark Bowden's sensationalized book about the ill-fated 1993 Battle of Mogadishu, there is more at stake than box office profits. The Bush administration has made no secret of their desire to return to Somalia in a continuation of the "war on terrorism." Along with manufacturing the illusion that this hopelessly mutilated nation somehow poses a threat to us is the need to cloud the disgraceful reputation of our previous visit with enough hoopla and jingoism to assist in building popular support for another round of mayhem.

Right on cue is Colombia Pictures, whose role as war propagandists might have been a little less blatant without the Pentagon's "script approval"¹ and in-depth participation in the production. Not to mention the manner in which "David Rumsfeld posed for pictures with 'Black Hawk' director Ridley Scott, producer Jerry Bruckheimer, Sony Corp. chief executive Howard Stringer, Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America" at the film's premier.² Even Ollie North made an appearance at the screening.

Why does the Bush administration need Hollywood's help? Exploiting the atmosphere of rage following the September 11 catastrophe, George W. Bush has had little difficulty obtaining widespread public consent for his invasion of Afghanistan. However, convincing the public of the need to defend themselves against a list of nations that Washington elites have long desired to sink their teeth into might prove more difficult — particularly with the dubious inclusion of countries like Cuba on their hit list.

But first up is Somalia (or possibly Iraq), whom we are told may be guilty of the familiar charge of harboring terrorists — a charge the United States could be considered guilty of themselves were they to apply their terminology consistently. The state department maintains they are concerned that members of al Qaeda may try to regroup in Somalia and have been appealing to claims by Ethiopia's ambassador that Somali Islamic group al Ittihaad is a terrorist threat. But as DAWN Journalist James Astill points out, "to strike Somalia on Ethiopia's advice would be like invading Pakistan on a tip-off from India."³ Of course, the point of such justifications is not whether they are valid, but whether the public will buy them. Rumsfeld & Co. are surely hoping that *Black Hawk Down* will help sell their story.

The chaotic situation in the opening scenes of the movie raises the question: how did things get this way in the first place? Not once in the movie is the name Siad Barre mentioned. Barre, of course, was the vicious despot who ruled Somalia for more than three decades, solidifying power by playing rival clans against one another in a bloody power struggle. He had originally been supported by the Soviet Union, but when the pro-American Ethiopian government was taken over by a leftist regime, America swapped puppets with the Soviets, adopting Barre, whose status as a murderous communist dictator was simply disregarded. In return for allowing the United States to set up a military base in Somalia, Barre was rewarded with all the military assistance he needed to strengthen his position and conduct his war for the Ogaden region of Ethiopia.

Barre received approximately "\$100 million annually in US economic and military aid in the 1980s"⁴ — which amounted to almost a billion dollars over the period of American support. The fact that Barre was using this aid to massacre his own people and destroy Somalia's infrastructure was known and suppressed by Washington for several years. The civilian death toll under Barre is thought to have been over 50,000 in the year 1988 alone.⁵ The next year, Barre was finally driven from power and Somalia deteriorated into chaos, prompting the United States to exit stage left with — as former U.S. Representative Howard Wolpe put it — "a general indifference to a disaster that we played a role in creating."⁶ This disaster was a nation split into numerous warring factions and flooded with more weapons than people! Unexamined in the movie is the tragic irony that many of the arms being used against the Rangers were of U.S. origin, purchased by American taxpayers and generously

donated by the Carter, Reagan, and Bush administrations. The Saudis, Chinese, and Italians played a large part as well, even then, in some cases, at the United States' behest.

During Barre's reign, there was significant interest in Somalia because of its strategic location relative to the Persian Gulf. However, with the end of the Cold War and the establishment of more secure bases in places like Saudi Arabia, strategic interest in Somalia became secondary.

High on the list was helping Somalia to "get its act together," as Thomas E. O'Connor (the principal petroleum engineer for the World Bank) put it, in order that its "high [commercial] potential" for oil might be exploited by the four American oil companies — Amoco, Chevron, Conoco and Phillips — to which Siad Barre had allocated "nearly two-thirds of Somalia."⁷ The eagerness with which Conoco provided its offices as headquarters for the military in Somalia is all too reminiscent of United Fruit's donation of its freighters to the CIA for their failed proxy invasion of Cuba. Though many have argued that oil was unlikely to be the primary motivation, it would be far from the first time that the desires of big business have dictated American foreign policy. To dismiss altogether the role of oil in the U.S.'s agenda seems somewhat naïve given the consistent motivations of most American interventions in recent history.

Even more important than oil is maintaining the very means by which foreign oil interests are ultimately protected: the pentagon system itself. Lacking the usual Cold War pretext for the obscene amounts of military spending necessary to maintain America's system of global hegemony, it was becoming increasingly difficult to justify the need for spending money on war instead of *wasting* it on schools, health care, infrastructure, the poor, etc. What better way to arouse public support for the military than to massively publicize a noble "humanitarian" mission "completely unrelated to protecting the national interest" to feed the starving people of Somalia?⁸

Nor were American elites particularly discrete about their desire to sway public support for maintaining Cold War military spending levels. Les Aspin, then Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, openly suggested that "it may be that to maintain a military for the extreme contingencies, it will be necessary to *show* that it is useful in lesser contingencies too..."⁹ Success in Somalia could serve to demonstrate the idea to American taxpayers that a powerful military force could be justified on humanitarian grounds.

Nowhere was the public relations nature of the 1992 intervention more transparent than in the farcical made-for-T.V. marine landing on the beaches of Somalia. Despite the Pentagon's public complaints that the camera crews had been in the way, CNN vice president for news, Ed Turner, maintains that it was "made... pretty clear that they'd like to have the story reported."¹⁰

The frequency of photo ops declined as the thin humanitarian facade of the intervention deteriorated along with the media's interest in the situation. One reason for this was that the incongruity between highly trained killers and their supposed humanitarian role began to manifest itself in a growing number of atrocities. The U.S. Defense Secretary was even quoted by author and journalist, David Halberstam, as saying, "we are not going to be able to control [the Rangers]. They are like overtrained pit bulls. No one controls them."¹¹ Another reason was that the officially stated purpose had shifted from facilitating the delivery of aid to an objective more consistent with Washington's principal motives: nation-building. It was decided that, arguably the most powerful warlord, General Aideed, was not an acceptable candidate for a pro-American regime; he had to be eliminated. The price of eliminating a leader with considerable popular support would have to be paid for in Somali lives.

Despite George Bush's partially accurate comments about "armed gangs ripping off their own people, condemning them to death by starvation,"¹² such incidents were limited to a number of specific trouble spots across the nation. The International Committee of the Red Cross, who had been delivering the majority of the aid, for example, was having a great deal of success peacefully negotiating with clan leaders and the situation was well on its way to resolving itself before the U.N. forces moved in. In fact, the Red Cross maintained that



the military intervention actually complicated aid deliveries due to the growing hostility towards the U.S.-led intervention.¹³ Of course, this did not stop the military from taking credit for the reduction in starvation for which the Red Cross had been primarily responsible.

One might then ask why civilian aid workers, who, until this point, had been doing an admirable job, had not been more heavily relied on. The proposition had been put before the U.N. Security Council, but met by staunch refusal on the part of the United States, for fairly obvious reasons. Ordinary aid workers served no purpose in a) stabilizing the region for exploitation by oil companies, or b) promoting the military's role for the American public. Both goals were substantially more important than the afterthought of feeding the hungry. The intervention, in the manner it was carried out, was the only acceptable scenario for the United States, who demanded and received full control of the entire "international" operation — though they wouldn't dream of accepting the blame for the atrocities that occurred as a result.

As the humanitarian veneer began to peel, reports of U.N. atrocities had begun to surface in the western media. Along with the well-publicized attacks on U.N. troops, were brutal stories of indiscriminate retribution from "peacekeepers." By the time troops had pulled out, "according to CIA estimates, the marines had left between 7,000 and 10,000 Somalis dead."¹⁴ Most of them were women and children, although Human Rights Watch has reported that — "military spokesmen of the U.N. and separate United States commands consistently refused to provide regular and detailed information on the identity or number of Somali casualties resulting from encounters with U.N. forces"¹⁵ in direct disregard for the Geneva convention.

The Americans were not the only ones responsible for the mess that ensued. Two Belgian paratroopers were caught in photographs roasting a young Somali boy over a fire (the two were since acquitted in a Belgian court based on a lack of evidence and their claim that they "were only playing a friendly game"¹⁶). Also, the Canadian Airborne regiment was disbanded for torturing a Somali teenager to death — surely another "friendly game" gone awry. Human Rights Watch documented a number of events including one in which "three U.S. Humvee armored vehicles drove through a crowd of demonstrators, opening fire after they were stoned. Journalists at the scene said that it was only after the U.S. fired that any Somalis replied in kind."¹⁷

The popular phrase among American troops, "the only good Somali is a dead Somali,"¹⁸ seemed to play itself out in a series of negligent helicopter strafe and missile attacks "in which it [was] impossible to distinguish combatants from noncombatants"¹⁹ — that are likely to have claimed more civilian lives than those of official targets.

It is one such *heroic* attack — the stated objective being to capture two of Aideed's men — that is fictionalized in *Black Hawk Down*, which dramatically follows a group of brave American soldiers fighting their way through, not only warlord Hussein Aideed's men, but an *entire city* of Somalis enraged at continual American-led aggression and bent on retribution. The audience is meant to cheer as the "highly trained pit bulls" demonstrate their superior military prowess against "the skinnys," as American troops smugly refer to the starving locals. The sensationalized slaughter of the Somalis is depicted in sharp contrast to the dramatic chorus of violins that accompanies the *much more* tragic American casualties. The Americans in the film are *real* people, played by stars that the audience knows and loves, whereas the "skinnys" are presented in the manner of Star Wars' evil, faceless and nameless storm troopers. Surely this is what the Pentagon meant when they said they wanted to "set the record straight" by assisting in the making of *Black Hawk Down*.

The perspective of the film fits nicely with the militaristic attitude of American nationalist media pundits, some of whom do not view the ill-fated operation as a total failure. "Yes, 19 of the massively outnumbered Americans

lost their lives after the initial plan fell apart," admits New York Post journalist, Jonathan Foreman, "but they killed at least 1,000 Somali[s]."²⁰

So what does America want with this cold war crash test dummy this time around? There's no longer any need to gain approval for feeding the pentagon; the so-called "war on terror" has served that purpose far beyond the expectations of even the most ardent warmonger. Oil is always a factor that lurks in the background, as is Somalia's strategic proximity, given the location of the other "terrorist" nations that Washington hawks have long desired to sink their claws into. Somalia would no doubt serve as an ideal base when the United States moves in to kill for peace in the so-called "axis of evil" nations, Iran and Iraq. Recent rumors of instability in Saudi Arabia — which U.S. officials are now beginning to acknowledge — caused by a growing local opposition to an American presence there lends credence to the latter motivation.²¹

This time, there will be little confusion about the reasons for sending military forces. If a second invasion of Somalia is to occur, it will be free from the troublesome pretense of humanitarianism, as was the case in Afghanistan, where American bombs have now produced more casualties than in the September 11 attacks.²² This time, the objective will be less ambiguous and more suited to the traditional role of soldiers. This time the public will be kept in line, shaken by grief, united in fear, numbed by biased news reports, and stirred by the timely release of films that place murder on a moral plateau. The nature of propaganda is such that it doesn't matter if the truth is readily available; the majority will cling to the version that is spoon-fed to them with the best special effects. As a result, the average western T.V. baby is provided with a unique political perspective when rationalizing their leaders' aggressive foreign policy: "Well, of course we have to attack Somalia; didn't you see that movie?"

Notes

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⁵ Finnegan, William. *Letter from Mogadishu — a world of dust*. The New Yorker. — March 20 1995

⁶ Zunes, Stephen. *Somalia as a military target*. Foreign Policy in Focus. Jan 11 2002.

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⁸ Sheehy, Thomas P. *To save the starving, internationalize the peacekeeping force in Somalia*. Background. #922. Dec 15 1992.

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¹¹ Zunes *ibid*.

¹² Clarke, Walter; Herbst, Jeffrey. *Somalia and the future of humanitarian intervention*. Foreign Affairs. March 1996

¹³ *Somalia Faces the Future — Human Rights in a Fragmented Society*. Human Rights Watch. Vol. 7, No. 2 April 1995. It should be noted, that this point of view is that of the ICRC alone and is contested by other aid organizations.

¹⁴ Pilger, John. *The Real Evil Empire*. The Age Online. David Syme & Co Ltd. http://www.uvm.edu/~wmiller/reallevilempire.html 1998.

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch. *Ibid*.

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¹⁷ Human Rights Watch. *Ibid*.

¹⁸ Zunes *ibid*.

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch. *Ibid*.

²⁰ Foreman, Jonathan. *Blackhawk Down* — Powerful, realistic but ultimately unsatisfying depiction of urban combat. New York Post. Dec 28 2001.

²¹ Aitkin, Robin. *Is Saudi Arabia becoming unstable?*

BBC News. Radio 4 today. Jan 30 2002.

²² Herold, Marc W. *A Dossier on Civilian Victims of United States' Aerial Bombing of Afghanistan: A Comprehensive Accounting*. Full text available at http://www.zmag.org/ZNET.htm

AUTODAFÉ VOLUME II: The Journal of the International Parliament of Writers; various authors

Seven Stories Press, 251 Pages, \$16.95.

www.sevenstories.com

The International Parliament of Writers (IPW) was created in response to the growing number of persecuted writers around the world. Shortly after the 1993 assassination of Algerian writer Tahar Djaout, a petition was signed by 300 authors expressing support for an organization to help threatened members of the writing community. One year later, the IPW was off the ground offering writers a network of asylum cities, visas and passports, financial aid, a public platform, and most importantly, a refuge free from censorship, imprisonment, and physical harm. Last year, the IPW created *Autodafé*, the Journal of the International Parliament of Writers.

Autodafé Volume II, the latest issue, contains 24 contributions from writers whose birth countries span five continents. Despite having diverse backgrounds, these authors weave a common thread throughout the book: the experiences of the untouchable. Part I of this issue is dedicated entirely to this theme, with essays that are stirring, absorbing, and complicated. Madeleine Mukamabano compiles the stories of fellow Rwandans who, breaking out of the pandemic silence, reveal the permanent scars of a massacre they've been taught to forget. Viktor Pelevin traces the history of a multi-faced Russian hero and finds that a culture once rich with folklore and humor has been replaced with consumerism. In an essay on Chiapas, Juan Villoro, discusses the anthropological complexities of the indigenous plight and Carlos Monsiváis follows by interviewing their leader, the untouchable Subcomandante Marcos—"the most famous and most unknown Mexican in the world."

Parts II and III, titled "The Archeology of Reading" and "These Cities Dying in Our Arms," explore other issues dealing with repression, passion, movement, and cultural identity. The Albanian author Bashkim Shehu describes an exhibit he created by contrasting different panels of a makeshift library: on one side official Albanian propaganda; on another side books deemed forbidden by the State; and, on the final side, books from Enver Hoxha's private collection. Alia Mamdouh, in an essay on her experiences in Iraq, addresses the internalization of the forbidden, where limits are pushed only within the confines of the mind—a place where she learns to cultivate the psychological resilience necessary to endure her repressive society. And Mehmed Uzun, the Kurdish author presently facing a prison sentence in Turkey for "inciting separatism," recalls a childhood slap to the face for speaking in his native tongue and the life-long lesson of transforming adversity into something meaningful and dignified.

Taken from Portuguese, auto-da-fé literally means 'act of faith' but is more commonly defined as the burning of a person or writings judged heretical. In an effort to extinguish these fires, members of the IPW have created another way to amplify the voices of the oppressed, to share their stories with a larger audience, and to connect exiled writers scattered across the globe. *Autodafé* is a moving, illumining collection that offers a unique lens through which to view society, culture, and politics. "I remain firmly convinced," writes Mehmed Uzun, "that it is the mission of language and literature to bring men together rather than divide them... Language is a warm place, sincere, that has room for all differences, where all these differences constitute a fabulous richness."

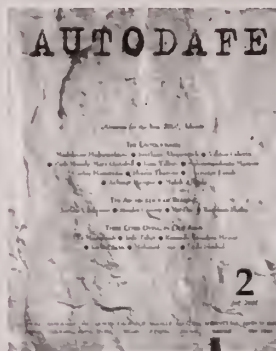
—Catherine Komp

The Decline and Fall of Public Broadcasting

By Dave Barsamian, Foreword by Amy Goodman, Afterword by Mumia Abu-Jamal, South End Press

www.southendpress.org

Anyone reading this magazine right now is at an advantage: you already know where to find alternative media. Unfortunately many people have never heard of (or don't have access to) the progressive print and broadcast outlets that deliver information unadulterated by corporate influence. Most Americans get the daily newspaper, watch the network news, and perhaps subscribe to a weekly periodical. Under the new deregulatory practices of the Federal Communications Commission, one company could own all three news outlets. Media consolidation is detrimental on several fronts: it concentrates power into the hands of a few; it



decreases diversity while offering an illusion of choice; and it accelerates the decline of journalistic integrity.

Nearly fifty years ago, the caustic political cartoonist Herbert Block said, "The first responsibility of the press is to use its freedom to protect the rights and liberties of all individuals. The press must speak out, and, if the occasion arises, raise bloody hell." Ten years later, in 1967, the Johnson administration created the Public Broadcasting Act calling for an alternative broadcast system that would express diversity and the concerns of the under-represented through non-commercial television and radio stations. Public Broadcasting System and National Public Radio, the media spawned from this act, are still considered by many to uphold these principled ideals. But in a new book a different story emerges—a story revealing that these networks aren't much different from the mainstream.

Dave Barsamian, the inveterate progressive media personality, chronicles the bastardization of PBS and NPR in his new book, *The Decline and Fall of Public Broadcasting*. In this thoroughly footnoted account, Barsamian describes the birth of PBS and NPR, the honorable intentions of its architects, and the immediate limits imposed by Congress ensuring the new network couldn't stray too far. "From its inception," writes Barsamian, "the small budget of the public broadcasting system has been hostage to Congress and the White House." Funding shortfalls led both PBS and NPR to embrace corporate underwriting. Inevitably, corporate influence on programming content increased. Barsamian outlines the most egregious cases like that of Paine Webber, a company with oil interests, funding a PBS program favorable to the oil industry and of Kuwait, the country, funding NPR programming during the 10th anniversary of the Gulf War. Barsamian asks who are the real pirates: independent community broadcasters or big corporations who have hijacked the airwaves?

After learning about this dismal state of public broadcasting and media consolidation, the urgent need to reclaim the airwaves becomes clear. Barsamian takes the time to review the promising state of independent media and the various publishers, websites, magazines, and community radio stations that are rising to challenge mainstream media. He uses the recent example of the Pacifica Campaign to illustrate what can be accomplished when people get mad and put up a fight. Barsamian is realistic but hopeful, saying

"The current media scene is toxic, it should be defined as a public health problem... Building new media institutions and expanding existing ones provides therapeutic relief." In other words, let's raise bloody hell.

—Catherine Komp

Jumping the Line

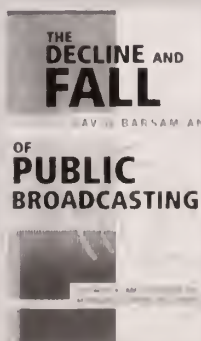
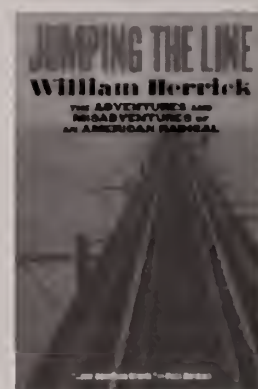
William Herrick

AK Press, 2001

www.akpress.org

"Jumping the Line" is a hobo phrase for "riding the rails," or hitching a ride on a freight car. It also brings to mind crossing boundaries, maybe even switching sides. Herrick has done both. Beginning life as a rail-riding hobo, Herrick developed an awareness of the plight of the downtrodden and eventually became not a member but employee of the American Communist Party. Herrick was hard-working element of the Party and an able union organizer and cell initiator. Willing to put his life on the line in backing his beliefs, Herrick traveled to Spain with the Abraham Lincoln brigade to fight the fascists in the Spanish Civil War. Comintern, the International Communist Party, hoped this effort would lead to a home for Communism in Spain. While Herrick's soldiering was brief (he quickly took a bullet to the neck, nearly crippling him), the Communist atrocities and double-dealing there made him see the Party in an entirely different light. Returning to the States an anarchist at heart, Herrick had a wife to support and was tied to the Party for a paycheck. His outspokenness about the Stalin-Hitler pact led to his dismissal and his full emergence as an anarcho-social democrat. Appearing in these pages as Herrick formalizes his distrust of all power is such figures as Emma Goldman, Cole Porter and Herrick's former employer Orson Welles. This fascinating work is historically enlightening and a textbook in the formation of practical anarchism from an adventurer-author struck from the same mold as George Orwell.

—Thomas Schulte



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Haunting April 16th, 2002





While the Enron scandal currently unfolds, another Bush family business scandal lurks beneath the shadows of history that may dwarf it.

On April 19, 2001, President George W. Bush spent some of Holocaust Remembrance Day in the Capital Rotunda with holocaust survivors, allied veterans, and their families. In a ceremony that included Jewish prayers and songs sung by holocaust victims in the camps, Benjamin Meed, a survivor of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, movingly described to the gathering what he experienced on April 19, 1943.

"I stood outside a Catholic church, which faced the ghetto," Mr. Meed said, "a young Jewish boy posing as a gentile. As I watched the ghetto being bombarded by the German artillery, I could see many of the Jews of my community jumping out of windows of burning buildings. I stood long and mute."

The survivor concluded his reminiscence saying, "We tremble to think what could happen if we allow a new generation to arise ignorant of the tragedy which is still shaping the future."

President Bush, appearing almost uncomfortable, read a statement that said that humanity was "bound by conscience to remember what happened" and that "the record has been kept and preserved." The record, Mr. Bush stated, was that one of the worst acts of genocide in human history "came not from crude and uneducated men, but from men who regarded themselves as

by Toby Rogers
illustration Ryan James

HEIR TO THE HOLOCAUST

PRESCOTT BUSH, 1.5 MILLION DOLLARS AND
AUSCHWITZ: HOW THE BUSH FAMILY WEALTH IS
LINKED TO THE JEWISH HOLOCAUST

cultured and well schooled, modern men, forward looking. Their crime showed the world that evil can slip in and blend in amid the most civilized surroundings. In the end only conscience can stop it."

But while President Bush publicly embraced the community of holocaust survivors in Washington last spring, he and his family have been keeping a secret from them for over 50 years about Prescott Bush, the president's grandfather. According to classified documents from Dutch intelligence and US government archives, President George W. Bush's grandfather, Prescott Bush made considerable profits off Auschwitz slave labor. In fact, President Bush himself is an heir to these profits from the holocaust which were placed in a blind trust in 1980 by his father, former president George Herbert Walker Bush.

Throughout the Bush family's decades of public life, the American press has gone out of its way to overlook one historical fact – that through Union Banking Corporation (UBC), Prescott Bush, and his father-in-law, George Herbert Walker, along with German industrialist Fritz Thyssen, financed Adolf Hitler before and during World War II. It was first reported in 1994 by John Loftus and Mark Aarons in *The Secret War Against the Jews: How Western Espionage Betrayed the Jewish People*.

The US government had known that many American companies were aiding Hitler,

like Standard Oil, General Motors and Chase Bank, all of which was sanctioned after Pearl Harbor. But as The New York Times reporter Charles Higham later discovered, and published in his 1983 groundbreaking book, *Trading With The Enemy: The Nazi American Money Plot 1933-1949*, "the government smothered everything during and even after the war." Why?

According to Higham, the US government believed "a public scandal ... would have drastically affected public morale, caused widespread strikes and perhaps provoked mutinies in the armed services." Higham claims the government thought "their trial and imprisonment would have made it impossible for the corporate boards to help the American war effort."

However, Prescott Bush's banks were not just financing Hitler as previously reported. In fact, there was a distinct business link much deeper than Mr. Higham or Mr. Loftus knew at the time their books were published.

A classified Dutch intelligence file which was leaked by a courageous Dutch intelligence officer, along with newly surfaced information from U.S. government archives, "confirms absolutely," John Loftus says, the direct links between Bush, Thyssen and genocide profits from Auschwitz.

The business connections between Prescott Bush and Fritz Thyssen were more direct than what has been previously written. This new information reveals how Prescott

Bush and UBC, which he managed directly, profited from the Holocaust. A case can be made that the inheritors of the Prescott Bush estate could be sued by survivors of the Holocaust and slave labor communities. To understand the complete picture of how Prescott Bush profited from the Holocaust, it is necessary to return to the year 1916, where it all began.

Post World War I: Thyssen Empire On The Ropes

By 1916, August Thyssen could see the writing on the wall. The "Great War" was spinning out of control, grinding away at Germany's resources and economy. The government was broke and his company, Thyssen & Co., with 50,000 German workers and annual production of 1,000,000 tons of steel and iron, was buckling under the war's pressure. As the main supplier of the German military, August Thyssen knew Germany would be defeated once the US entered the war.

At 74, "King" August Thyssen knew he was also running out of time. His first born "prince" Friedrich (Fritz) Thyssen, had been groomed at the finest technical business schools in Europe and was destined to inherit his father's estimated \$100,000,000 fortune and an industrial empire located at Muehlheim on the Ruhr.

In addition to Fritz, plans were also made for the second son Heinrich. At the outbreak of the war, Heinrich Thyssen discreetly

changed his citizenship from German to Hungarian and married the Hungarian aristocrat Baroness Margrit Bornemisza de Kaszon. Soon Heinrich Thyssen switched his name to Baron Thyssen Bornemisza de Kaszon.

Near the end of World War I, August Thyssen opened the Bank voor Handel en Scheepvaart in Rotterdam. The neutral Holland was the perfect location outside of Germany to launder assets from the August Thyssen Bank in Berlin when the financial demands of the Allied forces surfaced. But the war ended much sooner than even Thyssen calculated and what developed caught the "Rockefeller of the Ruhr" off guard.

On November 10, 1918, German socialists took over Berlin. The following morning at 5 a.m., what was left of Germany surrendered to the Allies, officially ending World War I. "At the time of the Armistice and the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, my Father and I were deeply saddened by the spectacle of Germany's abject humiliation," Thyssen recalled later in his autobiography, *I Paid Hitler*.

After the war, chaos descended on Germany as food ran short. Winter was looming over a starving nation when on Dec. 7, 1918, the socialist Spartacists League came knocking on the Thyssen Villa with armed militia. August and Fritz were arrested and dragged from jail to jail across Germany for four days. Along the way, they were lined up in staged executions designed to terrorize them.

It worked. When released, the two Thyssens were horrified at the new political climate in their beloved Germany. They could not accept that Germany was responsible for its own demise. All Germany's problems, the Thyssens felt, "have almost always been due to foreigners." It was the Jews, he and many others believed, who were secretly behind the socialist movement across the globe.

Meanwhile Fritz's younger brother Baron Thyssen Bornemisza de Kaszon moved to Rotterdam and became the principal owner of the Bank voor Handel en Scheepvaart. All the Thyssens needed now was an American branch.

1920s: The Business Ties That Bind

Railroad baron E.H. Harriman's son Averell wanted nothing to do with railroads, so his father gave him an investment firm, W.A. Harriman & Company in New York City. E.H. hired the most qualified person in the country to run the operation, George Herbert Walker. Averell hired his little brother Edward Roland "Bunny" Harriman as a vice president

By 1920, George Herbert Walker had already built a fortune in Missouri. Walker, a charismatic former heavyweight boxing champion, was a human pit bull. He lived life to the fullest, owning mansions around the east coast and one of the most extravagant apartments in Manhattan. His hobbies were golf, hunting, drinking scotch and beating his sons to a pulp. Elsie Walker, one of Walker's grandchildren described Walker as a "tough old bastard" whose children had no love "for their father." He was also a religious bigot who hated Catholics, although his parents raised him to be one. According to other sources, he also did not like Jews.

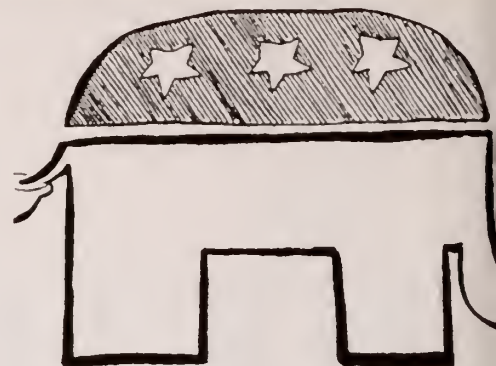
In 1922, Averell Harriman traveled to Germany to set up a W.A. Harriman & Co. branch in Berlin. The Berlin branch was also run by Walker. While in Germany, he met with the Thyssen family for the first time. Harriman agreed to help the Thyssens with their plan for an American bank.

The following year, a wounded Germany was growing sicker. The government had no solution and froze while Germany rotted from within. With widespread strikes and production at a near standstill, Fritz Thyssen later recalled, "We were at the worst time of the inflation. In Berlin the government was in distress. It was ruined financially. Authority was crumbling. In Saxony a communist government had been formed and the Red terror, organized by Max Hoelz, reigned through the countryside. The German Reich ... was now about to crumble."

In October, 1923, an emotionally desperate Fritz Thyssen went to visit one of his and Germany's great military heroes, General Erich Ludendorff. During the 1918 socialist rule in Berlin, Ludendorff organized a military resistance against the socialists and the industrialists were in great debt to him. When Thyssen met with Ludendorff, they discussed Germany's economic collapse. Thyssen was apocalyptic, fearing the worst was yet to come. Ludendorff disagreed. "There is but one hope," Ludendorff said. "Adolph Hitler and the National Socialist party." Ludendorff respected Hitler immensely. "He is the only man who has any political sense," Ludendorff encouraged Thyssen to join the Nazi movement. "Go listen to him one day" he said to Thyssen.

Thyssen followed General Ludendorff's advice and went to a number of meetings to hear Hitler speak. He became mesmerized by Hitler. "I realized his orator gifts and his ability to lead the masses. What impressed me most however was the order that reigned over his meetings, the almost military discipline of his followers."

Thyssen arranged to meet privately with Hitler and Ludendorff in Munich. Hitler told Thyssen the Nazi movement was in financial



It has been 60 years since
now are we beginning to
that the remaining Holocaust

trouble, it was not growing fast enough and was nationally irrelevant. Hitler needed as much money as possible to fight off the Communists Jewish conspiracy against Europe. Hitler envisioned a fascist German monarchy with a nonunion, antilock national work force.

Thyssen was overjoyed with the Nazi platform. He gave Hitler and Ludendorff 100,000 gold marks (\$25,000) for the infant Nazi party. Others in the steel and coal industries soon followed Thyssen's lead, although none came close to matching him. Many business leaders in Germany supported Hitler's secret union-hating agenda. However, some donated because they feared they would be left out in the cold if he actually ever seized power.

Most industry leaders gave up on Hitler after his failed coup in 1923. While Hitler spent a brief time in jail, the Thyssens, through the Bank voor Handel en Scheepvaart, opened the Union Banking Corporation in 1924.

Union Banking Corporation

Early in 1924, Hendrick J. Kouwenhoven, the managing director of Bank voor Handel en Scheepvaart, traveled to New York to meet with Walker and the Harriman brothers. Together, they established The Union Banking Corporation. The UBC's headquarters was located at the same 39 Broadway address as Harriman & Co.

As the German economy recovered through the mid to late '20s, Walker and Harriman's firm sold over \$50,000,000 worth of German bonds to American investors, who profited enormously from the economic boom in Germany. In 1926, August Thyssen died at the age of 84. Fritz was now in control of one of the largest industrial families in Europe. He quickly created the United Steel Works (USW), the biggest industrial conglomerate



ne of the great money laundering scandals of the 20th century ended and only
 the true historical aspects of this important period of world history, a history
 survivors beg humanity to "never forget."

in German history. Thyssen hired Albert Volger, one of the Ruhr's most influential industrial directors, as director General of USW.

Thyssen also brought Fredrich Flick, another German family juggernaut, on board. Flick owned coal and steel industries throughout Germany and Poland and desperately wanted to invest into the Thyssen empire. One of the primary motivations for the Thyssen/Flick massive steel and coal merger was suppressing the new labor and socialist movements.

That year in New York, George Walker decided to give his new son in law, Prescott Bush, a big break. Walker made Bush a vice president of Harriman & Co. Prescott's new office employed many of his classmates from his Yale class of 1917, including Roland Harriman and Knight Woolley. The three had been close friends at Yale and were all members of Skull and Bones, the mysterious on-campus secret society. Despite the upbeat fraternity atmosphere at Harriman & Co., it was also a place of hard work, and no one worked harder than Prescott Bush.

In fact, Walker hired Bush to help him supervise the new Thyssen/Flick United Steel Works. One section of the USW empire was the Consolidated Silesian Steel Corporation and the Upper Silesian Coal and Steel Company located in the Silesian section of Poland. Thyssen and Flick paid Bush and Walker generously, but it was worth every dime. Their new business arrangement pleased them all financially, and the collective talents of all four men and their rapid success astonished the business world.

In the meantime Hitler and the Nazi party were broke. Since the German economic recovery, members and donations had dried up, leaving the Nazi movement withering on the vine. In 1927, Hitler was desperate for cash; his party was slipping into debt. Hitler

told his private secretary Rudolf Hess to shake down wealthy coal tycoon and Nazi sympathizer Emil Kirdorf. Kirdorf paid off Hitler's debt that year but the following year, he too had no money left to contribute.

In 1928, Hitler had his eyes on the enormous Barlow Palace located in Briennerstrasse, the most aristocratic section of Munich. Hitler wanted to convert the palace into the Nazi national headquarters and change its name to the Brown House but it was out of his price range. Hitler told Hess to contact Thyssen. After hearing the Hess appeal, Thyssen felt it was time to give Hitler a second chance. Through the Bank voor Handel en Scheepvaart, Thyssen said he "placed Hess in possession of the required funds" to purchase and redesign the Palace. Thyssen later said the amount was about 250,000 marks but leading Nazis later claimed that just the re-molding cost over 800,000 marks (equivalent to \$2 million today).

Regardless of the cost, Hitler and Thyssen became close friends after the purchase of the Brown House. At the time, neither knew how influential that house was to become the following year when, in 1929, the great depression spread around the world. With the German economic recovery up in flames, Hitler knew there was going to be a line out the door of industrialists waiting to give him cash.

1930s: Hitler Rises — Thyssen/Bush Cash In

Thyssen would later try to claim that his weekends with Hitler and Hess at his Rhineland castles were not personal but strictly business and that he did not approve of most of Hitler's ideas, but the well-known journalist R.G Waldeck, who spent time with Thyssen at a spa in the Black Forest, remembered quite differently. Waldeck said when he and Thyssen would walk through the

cool Black Forest in 1929-30, Thyssen would tell Waldeck that he believed in Hitler. He spoke of Hitler "with warmth" and said the Nazis were "new men" that would make Germany strong again. With the depression bleeding Europe, Thyssen's financial support made Hitler's rise to power almost inevitable.

The great depression also rocked Harriman & Co. The following year, Harriman & Co. merged with the London firm Brown/Shipley. Brown/Shipley kept its name, but Harriman & Co. changed its name to Brown Brothers, Harriman. The new firm moved to 59 Wall St. while UBC stayed at 39 Broadway. Averell Harriman and Prescott Bush reestablished a holding company called The Harriman 15 Corporation. One of the companies Harriman had held stock in was the Consolidated Silesian Steel Company. Two thirds of the company was owned by Friedrich Flick. The rest was owned by Harriman.

In December 1931, Fritz Thyssen officially joined the Nazi party. When Thyssen joined the movement, the Nazi party was gaining critical mass around Germany. The charismatic speeches and persona of Hitler, the depression and the Thyssen's Bank voor Handel en Scheepvaart all contributed to Hitler's sudden rise in popularity with the German people.

In September 1932, Thyssen invited a group of elite German industrial tycoons to his castle to meet with Hitler. They spent hours questioning Hitler, who answered all their questions with the "utmost satisfaction," Thyssen remembered. The money poured in from the industrial circles mostly due to Hitler's "monarchistic attitude" towards labor and issues of class.

But by November, German voters grew weary of Hitler's antidemocratic tendencies and turned to the Communist party, which gained the most seats in the fall election. The

Nazis lost a sweeping 35 seats in the Reichstag, but since the Nazis were already secretly negotiating a power sharing alliance with Hindenberg that would ultimately lead to Hitler declaring himself dictator, the outcry of German voters was politically insignificant.

By 1934, Hindenberg was dead and Hitler completely controlled Germany. In March, Hitler announced his plans for a vast new highway system. He wanted to connect the entire Reich with an unprecedented wide road design, especially around major ports. Hitler wanted to bring down unemployment but, more importantly, needed the new roads for speedy military maneuvers.

Hitler also wanted to seriously upgrade Germany's military machine. Hitler ordered a "rebirth of the German army" and contracted Thyssen and United Steel Works for the overhaul. Thyssen's steel empire was the cold steel heart of the new Nazi war machine that led the way to World War II, killing millions across Europe.

Thyssen's and Flick's profits soared into the hundreds of millions in 1934 and the Bank voor Handel en Scheepvaart and UBC in New York were overflowing with money. Prescott Bush became managing director of UBC and handled the day-to-day operations of the new German economic plan. Bush's shares in UBC peaked with Hitler's new German order. But while production rose, irony did as well.

On March 19, 1934, Prescott Bush handed Averell Harriman a copy of that day's New York Times. The Polish government was applying to take over Consolidated Silesian Steel Corporation and Upper Silesian Coal

and Steel Company from "German and American interests" because of rampant "mismanagement, excessive borrowing, fictitious bookkeeping and gambling in securities." The Polish government required the owners of the company, which accounted for over 45% of Poland's steel production, to pay at least its full share of back taxes. Bush and Harriman would eventually hire attorney John Foster Dulles to help cover up any improprieties that might arise under investigative scrutiny.

Hitler's invasion of Poland in 1939 ended the debate about Consolidated Silesian Steel Corporation and Upper Silesian Coal and Steel Company. The Nazis knocked the Polish Government off Thyssen, Flick and Harriman's steel company and were planning to replace the paid workers. Originally Hitler promised Stalin they would share Poland and use Soviet prisoners as slaves in Polish factories. Hitler's promise never actually materialized and he eventually invaded Russia.

1940s: Business As Usual

Consolidated Silesian Steel Corporation was located near the Polish town of Oswiecim, one of Poland's richest mineral regions. That was where Hitler set up the Auschwitz concentration camp. When the plan to work Soviet prisoners fell through, the Nazis transferred Jews, communists, gypsies and other minority populations to the camp. The prisoners of Auschwitz who were able to work were shipped to 30 different companies.

One of the companies was the vast Consolidated Silesian Steel Corporation.

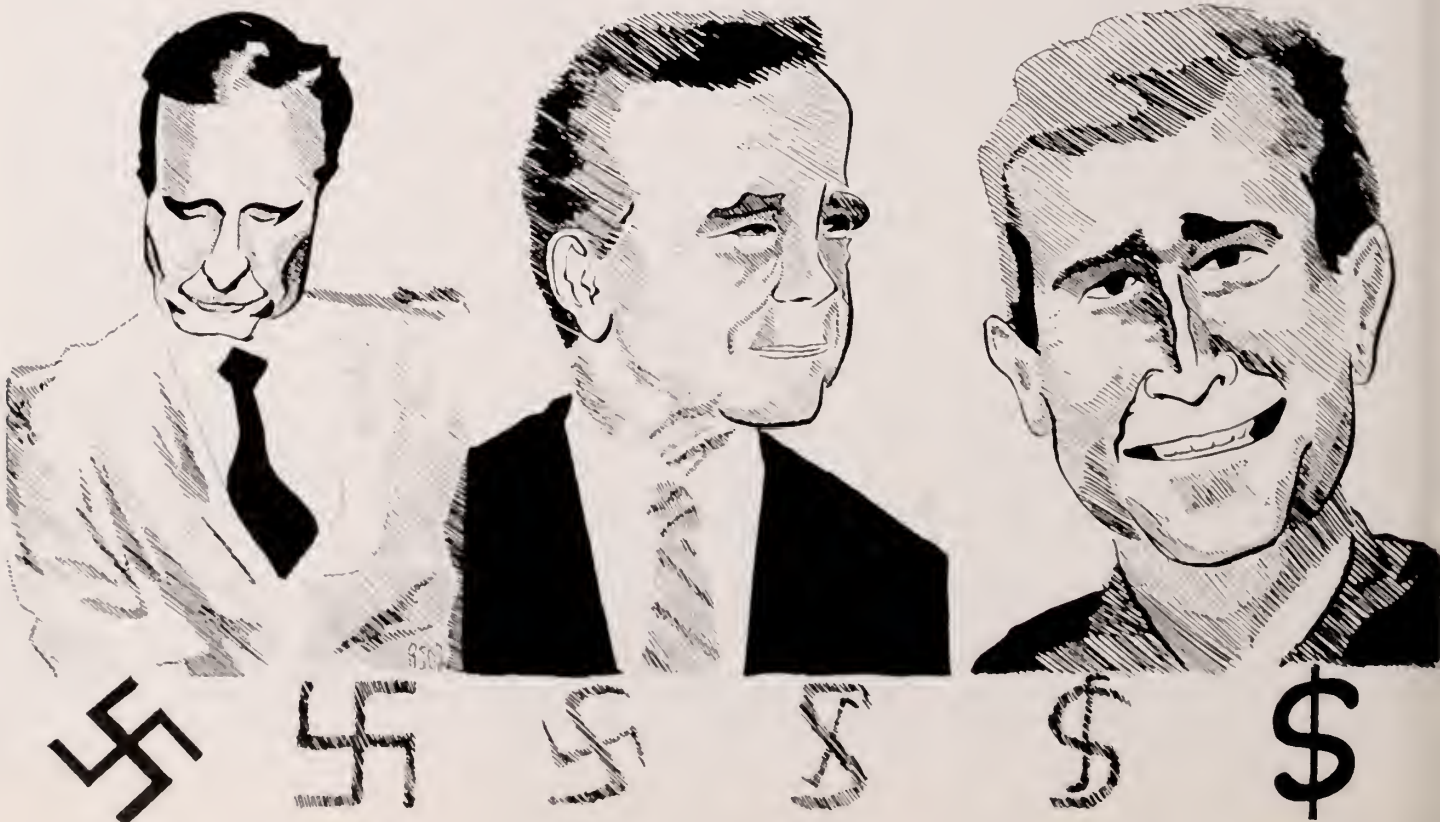
"Nobody's made the connection before between Consolidated Silesian Steel Corporation, Auschwitz and Prescott Bush," John Loftus told Clamor.

"That was the reason why Auschwitz was built there. The coal deposits could be processed into either coal or additives for aviation gasoline."

Even though Thyssen and Flick's Consolidated Steel was in their possession, Hitler's invasions across Europe spooked them, bringing back memories of World War I. Thyssen and Flick sold Consolidated Steel to UBC. Under the complete control of Harriman and management of Bush, the company became Silesian American Corporation which became part of UBC and Harriman's portfolio of 15 corporations. Thyssen quickly moved to Switzerland and later France to hide from the terror about to be unleashed by the Nazi war machine he had helped build.

A portion of the slave labor force in Poland was "managed by Prescott Bush," according to a Dutch intelligence agent. In 1941, slave labor had become the lifeblood of the Nazi war machine. The resources of Poland's rich steel and coal field played an essential part in Hitler's invasion of Europe.

According to Higham, Hitler and the Fraternity of American businessmen "not only sought a continuing alliance of interests for the duration of World War II, but supported the idea of a negotiated peace with Germany that would bar any reorganization of Europe



along liberal lines. It would leave as its residue a police state that would place the Fraternity in postwar possession of financial, industrial, and political autonomy."

Six days after Pearl Harbor and the US declaration of war at the end of 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau and US Attorney General Francis Biddle signed the Trading With the Enemy Act, which banned any business interests with US enemies of war. Prescott Bush continued with business as usual, aiding the Nazi invasion of Europe and supplying resources for weaponry that would eventually be turned on American soldiers in combat against Germany.

On October 20, 1942, the U.S. government had had enough of Prescott Bush and his Nazi business arrangements with Thyssen. Over the summer, The New York Tribune had exposed Bush and Thyssen, whom the Tribune dubbed "Hitler's Angel." When the US government saw UBC's books, they found out that Bush's bank and its shareholders "are held for the benefit of ... members of the Thyssen family, [and] is property of nationals ... of a designated enemy country." The list of seven UBC share holders was:

E. Roland Harriman - 3991 shares
Cornelis Lievense - 4 shares
Harold D. Pennington - 1 share
Ray Morris - 1 share
Prescott S. Bush - 1 share
H.J. Kouwenhoven - 1 share
Johann G. Groeninger - 1 share.

The UBC books also revealed the myriad of money and holding companies funneled from the Thyssens and the government realized UBC was just the tip of the iceberg. On November 17, 1942, The US government also took over the Silesian American Corporation, but did not prosecute Bush for the reasons Higham noted earlier. The companies were allowed to operate within the Government Alien Property custodian office with a catch - no aiding the Nazis. In 1943, while still owning his stock, Prescott Bush resigned from UBC and even helped raise money for dozens of war-related causes as chairman of the National War Fund.

After the war, the Dutch government began investigating the whereabouts of some jewelry of the Dutch royal family that was stolen by the Nazis. They started looking into books of the Bank voor Handel en Scheepvaart. When they discovered the transaction papers of the Silesian American Corporation, they began asking the bank manager H.J. Kounhoven a lot of questions. Kouwenhoven was shocked at the discovery and soon traveled to New York to inform Prescott Bush. According to Dutch intelligence, Kouwenhoven met with Prescott soon after

Christmas, 1947. Two weeks later, Kouwenhoven apparently died of a heart attack.

1950s: Bush Sells UBC Stock

By 1948, Fritz Thyssen's life was in ruins. After being jailed by the Nazis, he was jailed by the Allies and interrogated extensively, but not completely, by US investigators. Thyssen and Flick were ordered to pay reparations and served time in prison for their atrocious crimes against humanity.

On February 8, 1951, Fritz Thyssen died bitterly in Argentina at the age of 78. Thyssen was angry at the way he was treated by Europe after the war and how history would remember him as Hitler's most important and prominent financier.

When Thyssen died, the Alien Property Custodian released the assets of the Union Banking Corporation to Brown Brothers Harriman. The remaining stockholders cashed in their stocks and quietly liquidated the rest of UBC's blood money.

Prescott Bush received \$1.5 million for his share in UBC. That money enabled Bush to help his son, George Herbert Walker Bush, to set up his first royalty firm, Overby Development Company, that same year. It was also helpful when Prescott Bush left the business world to enter the public arena in 1952 with a successful senatorial campaign in Connecticut. On October 8th, 1972, Prescott Bush died of cancer and his will was enacted soon after.

In 1980, when George H.W. Bush was elected vice president, he placed his father's family inheritance in a blind trust. The trust was managed by his old friend and quail hunting partner, William "Stamps" Farish III. Bush's choice of Farish to manage the family wealth is quite revealing in that it demonstrates that the former president might know exactly where some of his inheritance originated. Farish's grandfather, William Farish Jr., on March 25th, 1942, pleaded "no contest" to conspiring with Nazi Germany while president of Standard Oil in New Jersey. He was described by Senator Harry Truman in public of approaching "treason" for profiting off the Nazi war machine. Standard Oil, invested millions in IG Farben, who opened a gasoline factory within Auschwitz in 1940. The billions "Stamps" inherited had more blood on it than Bush, so the paper trail of UBC stock would be safe during his 12 years in presidential politics.

It has been 60 years since one of the great money laundering scandals of the 20th century ended and only now are we beginning to see the true historical aspects of this important period of world history, a history that the remaining Holocaust survivors beg humanity to "never forget."

Loftus believes history will view Prescott Bush as harshly as Thyssen. "It is bad enough that the Bush family helped raise the money for Thyssen to give Hitler his start in the 1920s, but giving aid and comfort to the enemy in time of war is treason. The Bush bank helped the Thyssens make the Nazi steel that killed Allied soldiers. As bad as financing the Nazi war machine may seem, aiding and abetting the Holocaust was worse. Thyssen's coal mines used Jewish slaves as if they were disposable chemicals. There are six million skeletons in the Thyssen family closet, and a myriad of criminal and historical questions to be answered about the Bush family's complicity."

There is no question that the Bush family needs to donate at least \$1.5 million to the proper Holocaust reparation fund. Since Prescott Bush is dead, the only way to compensate is for the main inheritors of his estate to make amends with surviving slaves and the families of slaves who died in Bush and Thyssen's coal mines. If the Bush family refuses to contribute the money to compensate for Prescott Bush's involvement in the Holocaust, it is like denying the Holocaust itself and their role in one of the darkest moments in world history. ★

Special thanks to John Loftus, Emmy winning journalist, author and current president of the Florida Holocaust Museum.

Unitarian Universalist Young Adult Network

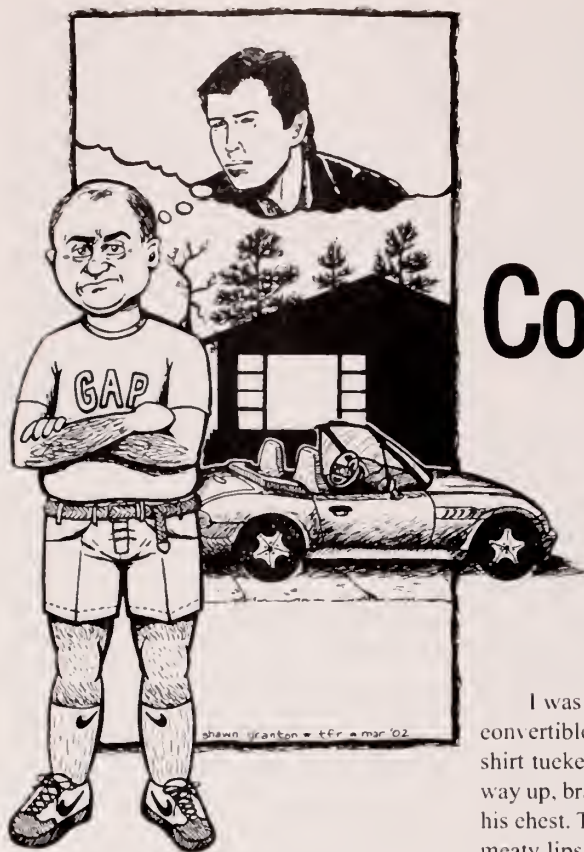


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Couch Space

by Sean Carswell

I was drinking a beer on the front porch when the landlord pulled up in his little BMW convertible. He was a pugnacious little guy, dressed like a businessman on his day off: Gap t-shirt tucked into khaki shorts held up by a braided belt, calf-high Nike socks pulled all the way up, brand new white Nike sneakers. He stood by the car, took a deep breath and stuck out his chest. The way that he did this and the way that he glared at the house and the way that his meaty lips twisted somewhere between a snarl and a whine all reminded me of a schoolyard bully. I was predisposed to dislike him before I met him. Seeing him made me downright loathe the guy.

Through the bedroom window, I heard Tracy's roommate say, "Put that away. The landlord's here."

"Fuck it," Tracy said. "He ain't our landlord anymore." Then, I heard the sound of gurgling water. Followed by the sweet, sick smell of pot smoke drifting out of the bedroom window.

Heather, who was another of Tracy's roommates, was standing in the driveway, chatting with her friend. I didn't know her friend's name at this point. I didn't care. All I needed to know about him was that he was the next sucker who owned a truck. My replacement.

Heather said hi to the landlord as he walked towards her. "I like your car," she said. "What kind is it?"

"BMW," the landlord said. I couldn't see him roll his eyes but I assumed he did. At the time, this model was a popular trend among yuppie men. The BMW corporation had paid a movie studio big bucks so that James Bond would drive their car in his next movie. James Bond (or at least Pierce Brosnan) did, so suddenly the freeways of Atlanta were littered with balding, middle-aged men from Marietta in little black convertibles.

Heather apparently hadn't noticed this. Sometimes, Heather didn't seem to notice a whole lot of anything in general. "It looks like that other kind of car. What's it called?"

"It doesn't look like any other kind of car," the landlord said.

"No, it does," Heather said. "It looks just like those other cars. You know the ones I'm talking about."

"It doesn't look like any other kind of car."

Heather turned to the other sucker who owned a truck. "What's the name of that car, Nick? You know the kind I'm talking about."

"Mazda Miata," Nick said.

"Yeah, that's it. It looks just like a Mazda Miata, don't you think?" Heather said. "Anyway, it's cute."

"It doesn't look like any other kind of car," the landlord said again. He stormed off towards the house.

I felt that old schoolyard reflex kick in. I wanted to point and laugh at the landlord. "Heh-heh. You got scuffed," because I knew that men ignored the Mazda and paid \$25,000 more for the BMW solely for the dream that came with that car, the dream that driving it made you dashing and mysterious, and beautiful young women would love you for it. And here was Heather, who I wouldn't necessarily call beautiful, but she was young and really pretty, and the whole dream was lost on her. Beautiful young women not only didn't swoon over the car,

they didn't even recognize that they were supposed to swoon. On top of it all, Heather called it "cute," which is the last word a 40-year-old balding guy wants to hear. The landlord stomped up the front porch steps and into the house. I laughed to myself.

Earlier that day, Tracy had called me. My first thought was, "Damn it, who gave Tracy my phone number?" Tracy and I both worked in the same restaurant in downtown Atlanta but we weren't friends, really. We got along fine at work, chatted sometimes, ran food for each other, but that was it. She'd have no real reason to call me on my day off, I figured, unless she wanted me to work her shift for her. Ordinarily, that wouldn't have been so bad but this was my last day off for a month. And the second half of that month, the Olympics were coming to town. Things were about to get really crazy. I just wanted one day to be alone and chill out before the craziness. So no, there was no way I was going to work a shift for Tracy. But when Tracy started the conversation by saying, "You have a truck, don't you?", I realized things were going to be a lot worse.

The bummer about owning a truck is that everyone bugs you to help them move. I'd had that truck for a long time though, and had gotten good at saying no. My resistance was strong when Tracy started the conversation but she had a pretty good argument. Her landlord had called her up that morning. He told her that he had managed to rent her house for the month of the Olympics. The new tenants were willing to pay three times as much money for two weeks as Tracy and her roommates paid for a whole month, so Tracy and her roommates had to go. That day, I tried to argue with Tracy, saying that he couldn't do that and that they should fight him instead of move and so on. Tracy just said, "Look, he's got a lawyer, and we don't. We have to move. Will you help me?"

"One load," I said. "Then you've got to find someone else with a truck."

So I went over to Tracy's house and the scene was a horror show. All of their stuff was scattered throughout the house. Nothing was in boxes. They didn't even have boxes. It was clear that all three women there hadn't planned on moving when they woke up that morning. And they just weren't handling the situation well. Heather was on the phone, trying to line up a couch to sleep on for a month. Tracy sat in the middle of a pile of clothes, doing bong hits. Their last roommate, Carrie, walked around the house with a garbage bag, picking things up, saying, "Is this mine?" and stuffing them in the garbage bag if someone said, "Yes." It seemed hopeless until Tracy said to me, "Beer's in the fridge. Help yourself."

Helping your friends move can be a pretty depressing thing to begin with. Sometimes you see more about them than you want to. It's like looking at them naked, first thing in the morning, with bad lighting. It's even worse when there are no boxes and you're stuffing things into garbage bags. You pick up a sun-yellowed, one-armed doll with thinning hair and ask a 25-year-old woman what she wants to do with it. You watch her hug it and say, "I'll take care of Miss Peaches," and walk off. You pick up a folder of essays written in sixth grade handwriting, notice that Tracy got a bunch of Cs, but two essays with As and Good Jobs and stars drawn on top with a red pen. You want to read them really badly — just to understand why she kept them all these years — but stuff them into the plastic bag instead. And your day goes on.

I ended up hauling three loads of stuff to six or seven different places. Mostly, we'd carry bags up to apartments where someone would say, "You can use this closet," or "Stuff all that shit under my bed." Everyone seemed to apologize about not having extra room on the couch, saying they'd already promised their couch to their cousin or old high school friend or whoever else was coming to town for the Olympics. We took most of the furniture to a warehouse space just off of Auburn Avenue. I knew the warehouse well. A couple of times a month, the kids who lived there would throw punk shows. I'd been to a few of them. As I leaned Tracy's mattress up against the graffiti-covered block wall, I wondered if it would still be leaning there when those kids threw their next show. (And sure enough, one month later, I saw her mattress, couch, and dresser standing to the right of the pit while three local hardcore bands played.)

Finally, Nick — the other sucker with a truck — showed up and took over for me. I grabbed a beer and sat out on the porch by myself to drink it. The summer heat was oppressive. The air hung heavy, thick and dead still, but two big oak trees flanked the porch, casting down a less-hot shadow. And the beer was cold. I looked at my watch, idly contemplated calling a friend and going to the Braves game that evening, and eavesdropped on Carrie and Tracy, who were both smoking pot in the bedroom behind me. As their conversation gave way to long, deep breaths and bubbling water, I thought about why I'd agreed to help these women to begin with. Because I'm a sucker, I thought. And laughed at myself. But also because I probably think too deeply about life in general. When Tracy called and told me about her landlord, the whole situation translated in my mind as something much larger. I thought that people

like me and Tracy are the servers and the tenants, the ones who get our money a dollar at a time and know what life is like without enough of those dollars. We know karma as a real and living force. I know that I have to run food to Tracy's tables for her because I need someone to run food to my tables for me. I also believed that I had to help Tracy move because I had already been lucky enough to find a couch to live on during the one month when all the couches in town were full. So that's what gets me into messes like this, I decided.

I cursed myself for thinking too deeply and swore I'd stop. I let my mind drift to more pedestrian daydreams about punching that landlord in the mouth.

That's when the landlord showed up and when Heather turned his dashing, \$40,000 car into a cute, \$15,000 one. The landlord stomped into the house. I laughed to myself. I thought too deeply once again and realized that, no matter how much the guy made from his new tenants during the Olympics, it wouldn't make up for the \$25,000 he'd just lost on that car.

Tracy came out to the porch. She saw me there and said, "I thought you took off already."

I drained the last few drops of my beer and said, "I'm just about to."

"You want a beer or anything for the road? A bong hit?" she asked me. I shook my head. She pulled out a small wad of dollar bills from her pocket. "Let me give you some money for this," she said. She counted out probably \$15 or \$20 from her wad and held the money out to me.

I didn't move. "Put your money away," I said.

She held it out for another few seconds, said, "Are you sure?", then put the money back in her pocket. "I wish I could do something for you."

I could hear the landlord inside telling Carrie that she had to hurry, that the cleaning people would be there first thing in the morning. I heard him say that the cost of cleaning the apartment would come out of their damage deposit. I thought about this.

"There is one thing you could do for me, Tracy," I said.

A minute later, I heard Tracy in the front room, speaking loudly enough for me to hear. She said, "Whoever's got the Mazda Miata, you gotta move it. You're blocking Sean's truck."

The landlord didn't even argue this time. He stormed back down the steps with the BMW keys in his hand.

Sometimes, small victories mean everything. ★

Seventy years before the WTO protests, the people of Seattle were busy organizing and fighting for a better life. Their actions would culminate in a complete takeover of the city. For a few brief moments, Seattle was transformed into a living example of direct democracy. The people of the town defied the government and business leaders and established a government that would provide for the needs of everyone, regardless of race, gender, or nationality.



The Spirit of Seattle: The General Strike of 1919

"We are undertaking the most tremendous move ever made by labor in this country, a move which will lead NO ONE KNOWS WHERE...Labor will feed the people...Labor will care for the babies and the sick...Labor will preserve order," wrote Anna Louise Strong in the midst of the Seattle general strike of 1919.

Seventy years before the WTO protests, the people of Seattle were busy organizing and fighting for a better life. Their actions would culminate in a complete takeover of the city. For a few brief moments, Seattle was transformed into a living example of direct democracy. The people of the town defied the government and business leaders and established a government that would provide for the needs of everyone, regardless of race, gender, or nationality.

Madeleine Baran

The Original Seattle Radicals

In the early 1900s, Seattle was a small city (pop. 300,000) dependent on government contracts for the main business in town — shipbuilding. Ten percent of the entire population was directly employed in the shipyards, and the well being of thousands more depended on the money in the shipyard industries. During World War I, the ship trade grew and established itself as the major industry of Seattle.

The government took advantage of the town's dependence on the industry and established the Macy Board in 1917 to control wages and working conditions. When the Macy Board announced wage increases in August 1917, the workers were outraged. The Board had created wage scales based on whether the workers were unionized. Workers who belonged to the union, most of whom were skilled, white, and male, received decent wage increases. Workers who were kept out of the unions because they were unskilled, female, or Japanese received either small wage increases, or in some cases, a wage decrease.

The Macy Board announcement came at a time of tremendous political turmoil in Seattle. The Bolshevik revolution was the main topic of conversation — generating both incredible excitement

amongst the workers, and fearful panic amongst the conservative business owners. Thousands of workers rioted against the intervention of the United States in the Russian Civil War, holding large street protests and singing the newly written songs of union activist and hobo Joe Hill. In the fall of 1919, Seattle longshoremen refused to load guns onto ships headed to Russia for Admiral Aleksandr Kolchak, the leader of the counter-revolution in Siberia. The longshoremen beat up the strikebreakers who tried to load them, and the arms were never sent. There was a very real fear that the workers would revolt and attempt to establish Communism in Seattle.

With revolution on the minds of thousands of workers, the Seattle unions massively increased their membership. In 1915, only 15,000 workers belonged to a union. By the end of 1917, 60,000 workers were union members in a town of 300,000 people! The number of union members was greater than the total number of industrial workers, an almost unprecedented feat.

The workers were organized in a number of large unions, controlled by the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The AFL refused to organize unskilled workers, Japanese immigrants, blacks, or women. They believed in craft or trade unionism — organizing workers according to the specific task they performed. In contrast, the International Workers of the World (IWW) was a radical, direct-action based union. The IWW was the only large union to admit any worker — skilled or unskilled, male or female, black or white. The IWW was also against the trade unionism of the AFL. Instead, they believed in industrial unionism — organizing all workers, regardless of the particular area in which they worked. The preamble to the IWW Constitution states, “The working classes and the employing class have nothing in common,” and, accordingly, although the IWW fought for wage increases and better working conditions, their eventual goal was the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a worker’s state.

Although the AFL had official control over the major Seattle unions, in particular the shipyard workers’ Metal Trades Council, the rank and file was much more radical, and supported the IWW in massive numbers. The tension between the workers and the union leaders was intense and reached a breaking point in 1919 when the Macy Board delivered their wage decisions.

Although the unionized workers stood to gain from the agreement, they refused to accept an agreement that would hurt the non-unionized workers, many of whom were Japanese immigrants, and therefore forbidden to join the AFL union. In November of 1918, the Metal Trades Council voted in favor of striking. Their demands were simple: eight dollars a day for mechanics, seven for specialists, six for helpers, and \$5.50 for manual laborers. The shipyard owners refused to negotiate, saying that they would only increase the wages of skilled workers.

The Strike

On January 21, 1919 the shipyards closed completely, and the strike began. Estimates vary, but the general consensus is that between 30,000 and 35,000 workers were on strike. The Metal Trades Council wanted to keep the strike peaceful, so they banned gatherings, protests, and parades. The employers still refused to negotiate, and several even went on vacation! National officials took out ads in local newspapers encouraging workers to return to work.

Just a day after the strike began, a new suggestion began to circulate among the workers. Why not try to organize a general strike? With the entire town of Seattle on strike, the reasoning went, the employers would have to listen to the demands of the workers. On January 22, the union hall voted to ask local unions to hold referendums on the issue. Only one worker voted against the proposal. A few days later, many local unions held meetings and voted almost unanimously in favor of striking in solidarity with the shipyard workers.

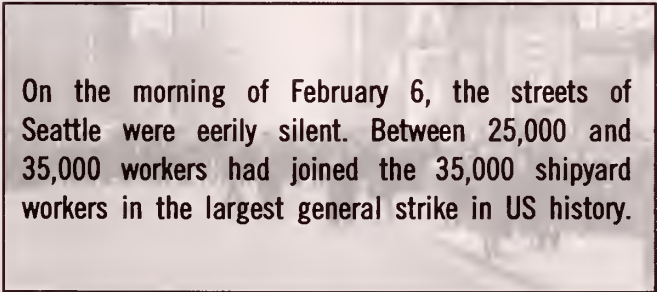
The excitement and energy in favor of a general strike was growing and was the talk of every union hall, corner store, and dinner table. While the workers earnestly believed that a general strike was about to become reality, the businessmen of Seattle scoffed at the idea. The Seattle Times wrote, “A general strike directed at WHAT? The Government of the United States? Bosh! Not 15 percent of Seattle laborites would consider such a proposition.” The Seattle Times also claimed that the city would be impoverished within 48 hours of the strike and that the lack of milk, especially for babies and hospitals would lead to mass starvation. A local businessman, Edwin Selvin, took out a series of full-page ads in three Seattle papers urging that all labor “agitators” be replaced by World War I veterans and that the unions should not be allowed to control the shipyards. Selvin’s ad only further angered the workers of Seattle, and convinced them that they really were at war with their employers. The tension mounted, and by January 28, 23 local unions were ready to strike.

At this point, the conservative AFL labor leaders lost all control over the situation, and the rank and file took charge. The AFL wanted the strike to stick to the immediate goals of better wages and did not want to include demands of unions striking in solidarity with the shipyard workers. The radical workers were much more idealistic and enthusiastic. They had no specific demands. They began to speak of revolution.

On February 2, a mass meeting of union delegates was held. They decided to start the general strike on February 6. The union members set up a General Strike Committee and an Executive Committee. In the course of a few hours, the Executive Committee became the new governing body of Seattle. Their job was to decide which services were essential, and therefore exempt from the strike. One by one, local businesses, workers, and even the mayor appeared before the committee. They exempted emergency transportation, fire protection, workers carrying government cargo, the post office, and trucks carrying fuel and laundry to and from hospitals. The exempted workers hung signs on their trucks that read, “Exempt by Order of the Strike Committee.”

On the morning of February 6, the streets of Seattle were eerily silent. Between 25,000 and 35,000 workers had joined the 35,000 shipyard workers in the largest general strike in US history. Streetcars didn’t run. Almost all stores were closed. The Strike Committee set up 21 cafeterias to feed the people. Art Shields, an IWW member, recalls, “All the restaurants were closed except for the chains operated by the cooks and waiters unions. The diet of beef stew, coffee, and pie was a little monotonous; but non-union men got it for 35 cents, union members for 25 cents, and if you had no money, the meals were free.” The Strike Committee also set up 35 milk stations to distribute milk to children and hospitals. The rumors and panic of the Seattle Times was unjustified; no one was starving and the hospitals were kept well stocked with fuel, clean laundry, and fresh food.

The local papers still warned of violence and chaos, but, again, they were proven wrong. The workers organized a Labor War Veteran



On the morning of February 6, the streets of Seattle were eerily silent. Between 25,000 and 35,000 workers had joined the 35,000 shipyard workers in the largest general strike in US history.

Guard, composed of 300 volunteer WWI veterans. They were given no weapons, and the sign hanging in their office read, "The purpose of this organization is to preserve law and order without the use of force. No volunteer will have any police power or be allowed to carry weapons of any sort, but to use persuasion only. Keep clear of arguments about the strike and discourage others from them." Crime during the strike actually decreased.

The break from work allowed workers to relax, play games at the union halls, and spend time with their families and friends. The general feeling amongst the workers was that a new form of society was taking shape, little by little. In an editorial published in the Union Record, striker Anna Louise Strong wrote, "Labor will not only shut down the industries, but labor will reopen, under the management of the appropriate trades, such activities as are needed to preserve public health and public peace. If the strike continues, labor may feel led to avoid public suffering by reopening more and more activities. Under its own management. And that is why we say that we are starting on a road that leads — NO ONE KNOWS WHERE!"

Despite the peaceful conditions, Seattle mayor Ole Hanson was eager to summon troops. The police he hired ended up costing the city \$50,000 and did not have to prevent one violent incident. The President of the Seattle Port Commission later said, "This strike was the most good-natured vacation ever enjoyed by working people in our city."

Despite the warnings of Hanson to call off the strike, announced to the people by government trucks armed with machine guns, the workers continued to resist. After the third day, however, the momentum began to die, and some strikers returned to work. On the fourth day, some streetcars began running and some restaurants reopened. The national leaders of the AFL demanded that local officials order strikers back to work. The Executive Strike Committee was worried about the break in the ranks and voted on February 8 to end the strike at midnight. The workers vehemently disagreed and voted against the proposal. The strike continued. On Monday, February 10, many returned to work anyway. And, again, the Executive Committee recommended an official end to the strike. This time, the general body of workers agreed and the strike ended on Tuesday, February 11.

Success or Failure: Seattle After the Strike

The days after the demise of the general strike were filled with government prosecution of the strikers. The Equity Printing Plant, a union-backed, socialist-run co-op, was closed, and the manager arrested. Police raided socialist and IWW halls and arrested 38 IWW members, charging them with leading the strike. Eventually the lack of evidence caused the charges to be dropped. Anna Louise Strong, the woman who wrote the powerful Union Record editorial, was charged with sedition and arrested. The charges were eventually dropped, but she fled to Russia. She was later deported from Russia for "subversion" and ended up in communist China many years later. The Electrical Workers 77, who participated in the general strike, had their charter revoked by its international leadership, as did many other local unions. Each union blamed the other for the failure of the strike, and the unity that allowed an entire city to provide for itself quickly disintegrated into name-calling and partisan bickering.

The shipyard strike did not end until March 17, when the workers returned to work with the same conditions as before the strike. The government quickly ended its contract with the Seattle shipyards, causing massive unemployment and poverty. It would be years before the unions would recover from the ensuing depression and police prosecution.

Opinions about the success or failure of the strike differ widely. Many historians and union activists agree that the strike's main flaw was its lack of a clear-cut demand that could allow for a measurable victory. The demands of the strikers were so high that only a revolution

could fulfill them. Labor historian Robert Freidham writes, "The Seattle General Strike was not a revolution, but it was a revolt"—a revolt against everything and therefore a revolt against nothing...Each man was striking for what he thought important. In the absence of stated goals and motivated readership, the Seattle General Strike was all things to all men."

In this context, it would be a mistake to simply classify the Seattle General Strike as a failure. If nothing else, the strike proved that ordinary, working people could run their city, make complicated decisions, prevent crime and violence, and provide for the essential needs of their fellow citizens.

When the anti-globalization protests took place in Seattle a few years ago, and the city was transformed into an enthusiastic, energetic street riot against capitalism, the connections to the general strike of 1919 were obvious. In different ways, both groups transformed their city into a vibrant, inspiring public space, if only for a few hours or days. By protesting against globalization, we can insure that the efforts of Seattle workers seventy years ago were not in vain. And we can take with us their idealism and their bold dream that we can actually transform society to meet the needs of all people — not in a hundred years or even a decade or two, but right now, in our own communities. ★

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SUSTAINABLE FRUGALITY

by Chris Dodge

I've got a close friend who grew up with parents who could afford everything. Her life has been marked by this in a way I can only partly understand. From time to time we struggle to understand one another. I drafted the following autobiographical essay in part so that she might better understand why I make the financial decisions I do.

I'm 44, middle class, a librarian and columnist for a bimonthly magazine. From my office overlooking Loring Park in Minneapolis one morning, I watched a woman in a stylish coat as she walked past parking meters and looked down for fallen coins.

There's an entire industry involved with parking meters. Someone designs them, then factory workers manufacture them using steel others have smelted. It's someone's job to decide where they'll be placed and how much they'll cost, and someone else's occupation to drive an odd little vehicle around and ticket cars at meters whose time has expired. It's yet another person's job to wheel around what looks like an upright vacuum cleaner and suck coins out of the things. Even on the coldest January mornings I've watched them do this. And I've seen other people routinely walk down the line of meters, looking for coins.

I used to live on the other side of the park in an apartment I rented for \$90 a month. This morning while walking to work, I remembered those days when I brought home \$60 or \$70 a week. I worked roughly 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., I think, or maybe 10-2, five days a week, lunch shift at the New China Inn, peeling garlic and washing dishes. I couldn't have spent more than \$40 a month on groceries, as I ate all I could at the restaurant: hamburgers, chow mein topped with cashews, deep fried red bean paste buns. I didn't go out to eat. I bought stale fruit pies at a bakery thrift store, four for a quarter, and consumed liverwurst sandwiches.

I came to Minneapolis with about \$40 in my pocket. I remember when I thought about selling blood plasma, but I never did that. I once walked to the Children's Theater and stood outside with my ear at a side door, listening to Sonny Rollins play a concert inside. I purchased paperbacks ten for a dollar

at a used bookstore on the 1500 block of Nicollet. And forwent dental care (which resulted in a molar crumbling suddenly in my mouth one day in 1980 or '81 after I started working at the library.)

Once, the New China Inn cigarette machine malfunctioned and I made off with as many packs as I could pocket. (Pull the knob under the Camel straights and a pack would come tumbling down without having inserted any coins)

I didn't feel poor. I lacked a girlfriend, which felt like a sort of abject poverty, but I didn't lack for entertainment. I visited the public library, played basketball in the park (becoming known as "Lickety Split"), and had a bicycle for a while, which was stolen. It was a green Gitane I'd purchased in my hometown shortly after learning to ride (at my sister's in Connecticut, sometime during a now fuzzy four-year on-the-road period between dropping out of school and moving to Minneapolis). I think I awoke one morning and realized I didn't know where my bike was, sensed I'd left it locked up outside. Wherever I'd left it, it was gone.

I once purchased bright red and green tie-dyed knit polyester shirts on 52nd Street in Philadelphia. I was perhaps the only white person on the busy block. The shirts were inexpensive and I was drawn to them impulsively. But their cheapness meant I hardly wore them before something caused me not to wear them — perhaps they fit badly, became misshapen after laundering, developed holes quickly, or all three. I did this with shoes, too: bought them cheaply only to have them hurt my feet.

"Buy the cheapest item. Always." It's taken me half a lifetime to realize it is often a better value to pay more for something which will last longer and work better. I've never been brand loyal.

When I'm alone, I'm cheap, mostly. I like flowers, but I only buy them for others. I like to buy treats to share with others. I don't want to be cheap.

I have never set foot in a sleeper compartment of a train. And have never flown first class.

I was hired to work at Hennepin County Library in Minnesota, after an interview

during which I wore a Salvation Army sport coat. Sal Army. St. Vincent DePaul, Goodwill: These were my designer labels. I was a thrifter before thrifting was cool. In fact, before it was even called thrifting.

Childhood

When I was a boy I didn't feel poor. I didn't go hungry. One birthday—my eighth? ninth?—I ate so much pizza and chocolate cake that I got sick.

I grew up living in a rented three-bedroom house at 643 Chestnut Street in Dubuque, Iowa, with four siblings, two parents, and a cat (later two cats). Down the hill lived working class and poor families; on top and beyond were the nice houses of doctors, dentists, and lawyers. We lived smack in the middle of the hill, in a house with pipes that froze in the winter. A house with big old storm windows I put up in the fall and took down in the spring. By the time I was in high school, I was the only child left at home.

We got our first TV when I was about seven, a small black and white one which got three or four channels. Sometime later: an air conditioner for the living room. Fans cooled us marginally on hot summer nights on which I fell asleep to a droning chorus of cicadas.

As a boy I wore some clothes that had been purchased new, but also plenty of hand-me-downs. Preferred hand-me-downs, actually. I idolized my older brothers and wearing their clothes was like getting inside their skins. (For entertainment, my brothers once poured gasoline down a cistern behind our house and then threw a match down it.)

A gangly chestnut tree grew behind the house. One day the son of the "how-do" man down the street—a skinny man who often walked with his dog and greeted me with a "How do?"—fell from a tire swing that was hung from that tree, and cried "I busted my arm!" My mom came back and said, "you didn't break your arm," but yes, he did; he came back the next day with his arm in a cast, but there wasn't much suing back in those days. As a small boy, I used to collect chestnuts as if they were agates, smooth and brown, with a lovely, curvy grain. Sometimes I'd pry open a green, prickly one before it had begun to open on its own, then put the white nut in my pocket to turn brown. (It would do this in an hour or so: after about 40 minutes, it would be speckled tan and white.)



I remember the two trees in front of the house, how one of them had a peach basket nailed to it about 9 feet up (the work of my brothers), a basket with the bottom removed, for street basketball. I remember when the trees came down — to Dutch elm disease — and my mother being unhappy. I remember the locust tree that went up in place of the one that once held the peach basket, outside my second floor bedroom window that faced the street. How big that tree is now.

My friends and I also played with beat-up baseballs we'd covered with electrical tape (balls originally gleaned by my brothers from foul pops and home runs at Petrakis Field during Class A Midwest League minor league games featuring the Dubuque Packers). And we sometimes entertained ourselves by taking batting practice in the backyard at night with fireflies instead of balls. As a child I did own a baseball glove (Pee Wee Reese autograph), received as a gift one birthday or Christmas.

I owned a wagon, a tricycle, and a sled, though no bicycle or skates. Sometimes there were things I wanted. Occasionally I'd scrounge through jacket pockets in the hall closet for small change in order to buy baseball cards or candy. I must have received an allowance, but it must not have been much.

At perhaps age eight or ten I started making a little pocket money, a few dollars, by helping my dad do work for the woman who owned the house in which we lived. Catherine Winall was a wealthy widow, middle aged (though I thought her old), who lived in a brick mansion across the street from us on sprawling grounds which included terraces above stone walls, gates, and a two-car, three-level garage with automatic doors. I think at first my gig was picking up sticks. (There was a cottonwood tree that dropped branches prodigiously.)

Good fortune: One day I helped my father clean out part of a duplex on the street, a place three houses down that was also owned by Mrs. Winall. The renters had departed quickly and left a few items behind. I was a happy boy because I found a toy or two. (A small model racing car, I think, for one.) I just remembered the family's name: Mauser. Bob and Dave Mauser, I think were the names of two boys about my age. They didn't live there long. Tough boys.

Milk money: 3 cents for a carton at school when I was in kindergarten.

Vacations were few. For family entertainment in summer we'd sometimes go agate hunting. A short afternoon trip across the Mississippi River to Wisconsin, back by evening. Or drive to nearby Strawberry Point or Governor Dodge State Park: again, day trips to hike, picnic, and mess about on a beach. The only trips I recall with overnight stays were to visit my maternal grandparents in Glen Ellyn (west suburban Chicago), a three or four hour

drive. (They had TV, and served sausage and coffee cake for breakfast!) Two driving trips to upstate New York to visit my dad's family (once just with my dad, another time with the addition of my mom and my sister Sarah). And once to Door County, Wisconsin (where I slept in a hammock, bundled up, enjoying the stars and the cool fresh air), followed by a ferry ride across Lake Michigan. (The latter trip: just me and my parents.)

The family car: a sequence of at least two black Dodges, then a blue Ford Galaxie 500. All purchased used. The first new car was purchased when I was about 16 or 17, I think: a tiny white Toyota, bare bones, economical.

Going out to eat: a rarity. For a treat we'd sometimes go to Sandy's Drive-in for hamburgers, French fries, and shakes. (Was there anything else on the menu? Cheeseburgers and onion rings, I suppose.) Location: Dodge Street. (I swear.)

Each year or so, an older couple would visit, Hi-Hi and Ted. I've since been told that they were neighbors when my mom lived alone in Chicago during World War II with her infant — and then toddler — Jennifer, my oldest sibling. Hi-Hi and Ted drove a Cadillac, like Mrs. Winall — and like Mrs. Winall, seemed to have a new model each year. I think they'd treat my family to dinner at someplace relatively fancy: the Dodge House (on Dodge Street), the Chateau, or perhaps Timmerman's in scenic East Dubuque.

This was nice. I didn't feel deprived.

Things we ate: AlphaBits. Gummy oatmeal. (To this day my mother still offers me oatmeal and I still say "no thank you.") Boiled eggs. Pancakes. Campbell's tomato soup (sometimes with a little cheese melted in it and poured over saltine crackers). Later: SpaghettiO's. Homemade bread. (Thank you, Mom.) In the summer, food from the garden: tomatoes, peppers, lettuce. Goulash — hamburger crumbled and browned with onion over noodles. "Sloppy joes." Chili. Cornbread. "Skim milk is in the cracked pitcher." Pudding from a can.

Never soda pop.

A general principle was this: Throw nothing away. Jars, tins, tobacco cans, cigar boxes, plastic jugs and countless other receptacles filled the house, full (or nearly empty) of paint, oats, nails, pennies, seeds, buttons, crayon stubs, coupons, or simply stacked and awaiting use.

Worn clothes were patched and holey items mended. Socks without mates were saved for agate collecting expeditions. No stub of a pencil too small to toss. No scrap of paper that couldn't be used for making a list.

My older brothers once accompanied my dad to upstate New York and years later reported that they'd slept in a cemetery, fearfully. In contrast, my two trips east featured overnight stays in motels (one night en route

and one returning). On the other hand, for whatever reasons, my daily school lunch for five years beginning in junior high was a peanut butter sandwich, maybe an apple, maybe a cookie. The dryness of those peanut butter sandwiches still sticks in my throat today and saddens me a little.

But my life was easy, for the most part. Thank gawd I had books, paper, pencils, older siblings, and caring parents who generally let me run free, an advantage to the youngest child. More money wouldn't really have made my life then much better — nor led, I think, to a happier life today. Or would it have? I skipped a year of high school to graduate a year early and attend an affordable state school — the University of Iowa — to which I had a small scholarship. What if I'd continued for another year of high school, then been able to choose a more expensive smaller school? The question is moot.

Only one of my four older siblings graduated from college without a hitch. One entered the Air Force and completed a degree (thanks in part to the G.I. Bill) upon his return. My sisters and I all dropped out. There was an economic element to our individual decisions, but this should not be overplayed, I think.

The culture of working poor people is still in my blood: cigarettes, beer from a can, baseball, weather, arguments, Sunday church for some — and for others cartoons or sex. Rusty pick-ups, alleys, standing in busses, waiting in line.

On my walk home from work yesterday, as a little snow blew, a dark-haired man, probably American Indian, hailed me. "Hey, you got a cigarette?" As a matter of fact... I stopped and reached into my pocket and pulled out the sadly tobacco-shy remainder of the pack of Camels I bought on Christmas Day (of which I smoked perhaps six or seven). "You have a light?" I asked. He did. "My name's Ronk." Rock? "Ronk," he said, showing me the name tattooed on his left wrist. Ronk held a doobie he wanted me to smoke with him. I told him I couldn't do that and he was peeved. "I'm 44," he said. As if that would convince me to smoke with him. (In retrospective, it ought to have — it's long been a special number for me) 44? Brother, so am I: Solidarity. "You got enough for a pop?," he asked. He didn't mean soda pop. No, I said, but he asked again.

I'm Ronk, in more ways than one. As I headed out tonight, I passed a full Dumpster in my alley — it looked like someone had been cleaning out a garage. On top of a pile I saw a black leather jacket and thought if it was still there when I returned I'd pick it up. It was and I did. It fits a little snugly, but hey... It's heavy.

Tomorrow I'm going on vacation, carrying a Pierre Cardin suitcase, and heading somewhere nice. For what it's worth, the suitcase was also salvaged from a Dumpster.

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Western Sahara

A Peace Corps Volunteer's Perspective

by Jacob A. Mundy



1 Traveling by *grand taxi* with five other Moroccans and a driver, we head south to the city of Goulmine, passing the distinctively red, pink, and earthen colored Berber villages of the Anti Atlas Mountains. All along the way stand the native *argan* trees, looking like thorny, monstrous, unkempt bonsai. The taxi crests a pass and then blows through an insignificant town. Mountains give way to desert, and the way flattens out.

After just over an hour of travel, the taxi pulls into a dusty lot, the taxi stand and the bus station in Goulmine. We all happily pop out of the cramped taxi. The sun is out, bright, but blunted by the cool February air.

Squinting my eyes against the dust and the sun, I search for my next ride. I quickly heed the calls of "El-Ayoun! El-Ayoun! El-Ayoun!" shouted by an anxious taxi driver. He only needs two more people to fill up his collective taxi. I am number five and soon number six materializes. Pulling out of Goulmine, I am really on my way.

2 When I was accepted into the Peace Corps, and later offered an education position in Morocco, I knew next to nothing about the Western Sahara. I arrived in Morocco in June 1999 just as ignorant as the 70-some other trainees.

During our 10-week pre-service training, the Peace Corps Administration never mentioned the issue of the Western Sahara except as a warning. We were advised that it was a sensitive issue for Moroccans, one that should be broached with extreme caution, if discussed at all. We were also warned not to display maps that showed the Western Sahara separated from Morocco. In fact, one of the most popular projects in Peace Corps Morocco, the World Map Project, consisting of a large-scale map of the world painted on a school or public wall, came with strict instructions to carefully mind Morocco's 1975 annexation of the Western Sahara region.

We were also told that we could not go there. Our volunteer manuals stated any Peace Corps Morocco volunteer caught in the Western Sahara would have their service terminated.

The Peace Corps never bothered to tell us that the Western Sahara is home to the Saharawi people, and that most of the Saharawis — almost 200,000 — have been living in refugee camps outside of Tindouf, Algeria, for 26 years. We were never told that they were driven there when Morocco invaded the Western Sahara in 1975, bombing fleeing civilians with napalm. Nor was it ever mentioned that the Saharawis have never had a chance to express their right to self-determination because Morocco has done all it can to keep a genuine vote for such from happening. We were never told that Morocco's invasion of the Western Sahara spat in the face of the International Court of Justice's October 1975 ruling in favor of the Saharawis' right to self-determination; nor were we told that a U.N. visiting mission, that same year, reported that the population of the Spanish-controlled Sahara expressed an overwhelming desire for independence and held massive demonstrations in support of the leading Western Sahara liberation group, the Frente Polisario (the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Saguia El-Hamra and the Rio de Oro). We were never told that the Saharawis had established a government-in-exile, the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), nor that over 70 countries and the Organization for African Unity recognize the SADR — or that no country or international body has ever recognized Morocco's annexation of the Western Sahara.

We were also never told — surprise! — that the U.S. has been behind Morocco every step of the way, from pressuring Spain to hand over the Western Sahara to Morocco, to blocking resolutions in the U.N. Security Council that would have punished Morocco's actions, to assisting with the arms, aid, and military training that prolonged the 16-year war for Saharawi liberation.

3 Past Tarfaya, on the road to El-Ayoun, everything is flat — flatter than anything I've ever seen in my life. In the Western Sahara, there is nothing but roads, power lines, and ever-increasing expanses of *hammada* — endless, rock-strewn, almost smooth desert that only sinks into the bottomless mirage on the horizon.

Between Tan Tan and El-Ayoun we pass several national security road checks, most of which are placed just outside of cities and towns, nowhere unexpected. The only thing I am really worried about is that some gendarme will write down my ID information and it will somehow get back to the Peace Corps Morocco Administration that I had been in the Western Sahara. In such an event, I probably will be sent home, though it is only a remote possibility. Luckily, we pass through most controls with little more than a nod from the gendarme and mumbles of *salam* from the chorus in the taxi. Although, almost always, a small bribe is passed from the taxi driver to the gendarmes. A fact of life in Morocco.

The first time I ever came head-to-head with a Moroccan on the Western Sahara issue was in one of my classes. My most dedicated and curious student once asked me with sincere concern, "Why can't the U.N. just stop the killing in Chechnya and Palestine?"

"Well," I responded, "the U.N. can't just go into Chechnya to stop the Russians or to Palestine to stop the Israelis. It's not that simple." I then added, perhaps too hastily, "I mean, what would you think if the U.N. just took the Western Sahara from Morocco?"

"That's different," he responded forcefully. "The Sahara is a part of Morocco."

"What about the referendum?" I asked. "What if the referendum vote is for independence? Then the U.N. must take the Western Sahara from Morocco."

"No," he simply asserted. "The Sahara is ours. No one will ever take it from us."

After some initial confrontations with Moroccans over the Western Sahara issue, I decided I needed more information than was offered in my guidebook, the Lonely Planet: Morocco. Discussing the issue with other volunteers, I realized that we all had the same general picture of the conflict: Morocco had been at war with the Frente Polisario after Morocco took the Western Sahara from Spain; the Polisario was a pro-independence guerilla group that was currently trying to win independence through a U.N. sponsored referendum that was bogged down.

It was not until I found the homepage for the Association for a Free and Regular Referendum in the Western Sahara (www.arso.org) that I started to learn what really was going on in the Western Sahara.

I began pouring over the information, the weekly updates, the U.N. documents and the links. What first caught my attention was a speech given by Frank Ruddy titled "The United States Mission for a Referendum in the Western Sahara: Lofty Ideals and Gutter Realities" (address at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., February 16, 2000). Ruddy, former Deputy Chairman of Identification for MINURSO (the U.N.'s Mission for a Referendum in the Western Sahara), stated, "There will be no referendum for Western Sahara until Morocco permits it. How refreshing if the U.N. would simply say that. Everyone knows it, and it is simply and demonstrably the fact."

Ruddy went on to say, "Morocco's strategy is quite simply to delay a referendum they know they cannot win until the United Nations throws up its hands in frustration. And sad to say, they are getting away with it. In How Democracies Perish, Jean Francois Revel said that the best example of the unique Communist 'talent for creating non-information' was the Chinese occupation of Tibet where no information emerged to perturb the Sinolatry of the West. He called it 'almost perfect genocide that unfolded in almost perfect secrecy.' Morocco has taken a page from China's book, invading

and colonizing Western Sahara without drawing the world's ire or attention and holding itself out as a great friend of the West as it crushes the Saharawis right to determine their future, something the charter says the U.N. was created to ensure."

I found Ruddy's testimony to be so startling that I felt other volunteers needed to read it. Many were surprised, like me, to learn what was really happening in the Sahara. No one had bothered to tell us that the war in the Western Sahara was anything more than a struggle between Morocco and the "separatist" guerillas of the Frente Polisario. None of us had ever read about the almost 200,000 Saharawi refugees and their amazing feats of democracy, education, and women's empowerment.

Few of us understood that there was an East Timor under our noses.

The more I read about the Western Sahara dispute, the more I realized that I needed to see it with my own eyes.

We pull into El-Ayoun late in the day. I am surprised to find that El-Ayoun is not as nice as Moroccan tourist propaganda claimed. The El-Ayoun I am in strikes me as beat and run-down. Not a city worthy of a post card.

That evening I take a walk, hoping that I will not stick out quite as much as I would in the day. Sticking to the neighborhood near my hotel, I get the impression that El-Ayoun is well populated by Moroccans from the North. I had heard that the population of El-Ayoun is made up mainly of Moroccans who have been enticed to live there by artificially low prices, free housing, no taxes, cheap petrol, better pay for government workers, and other government-subsidized lures. A Moroccan friend of mine told me that teachers who accept positions in the "Sahara Provinces" receive double the pay.

"But where are the Saharawis?" I thought. Not all of them fled in 1975.

On my walking tour, I unexpectedly pass by the MINURSO headquarters, easily identifiable by the satellite dishes, mobile offices, numerous white SUVs with the unmistakable "U.N." logo, and the Moroccan soldiers with automatic weapons standing guard outside.

My first encounter with the MINURSO came when I visited the town of Tata, a dusty provincial capital on the Saharan side of the Anti Atlas Mountains, where camels, soldiers, and adventure-seeking Spanish tourists in dirty Land Rovers are all common sites. Sitting in a café, I spotted a white SUV with the U.N. logo.

I asked a volunteer friend what the U.N. truck was for. She said that it was a part of the Western Sahara referendum. She added that her landlord bragged about being paid by Morocco to vote, enough that he didn't have to work. All he had to do was go to El-Ayoun every now and then, and Morocco would later reimburse him.

"Is he from the Western Sahara?" I asked.

"No," she said. "He's not Saharawi. He's just a Berber from Tata."

Just an hour south of Tata by *grand taxi* is the town of Akka. What stood out about Akka is the high percentage of Moroccan troops stationed there. It seemed as if half the town was dressed in green

army fatigues, no doubt due in part to the proximity of the Algerian frontier — and Tindouf in particular.

A volunteer in Akka told me about his neighbor, a kind, weak, blind old man whose family often sent the volunteers meals of couscous and *tajine*. The volunteer said that sometimes he could see the old man out for walks with someone from his family to guide him. However, the volunteer added, the community shuns him and he — the volunteer — was told not to talk or visit the old man in his house. I asked the volunteer why this was the case. He said that the old man had disappeared into the Moroccan jail system. He then reappeared after 10 years with his health shattered, and his eyes obviously burned out.

The next morning, I woke early and got on my way, saving breakfast for Smara. Walking out of my hotel, I quickly found a *petit taxi* to take me to the Smara *grand taxis*.

Along the way, I realize that my walk around El-Ayoun the night before had been only of the modern and Moroccan side of El-Ayoun. I came to see that there was a whole other side to the city, an underclass side, with run-down buildings, dusty streets. All of it somehow almost forgotten. From the men and women I saw, most of them dressed in traditional Saharawi clothing, I got the impression that this was the Saharawi side of El-Ayoun. Everywhere I looked were men in flowing blue and white and women wrapped in beautiful tie-dies, surrounded by buildings and shacks that attested to divisions, both in class and

ethnicity, polarizing El-Ayoun into Moroccan and Saharawi spheres.

Luckily, I only wait half an hour for my collective taxi to fill up with five more people. Pulling out of town, a large tent city materializes to the right, a place that looks even drearier than the El-Ayoun I'd just left. I guess that this was one of the "Unity Camps," the 1991 exodus of "Saharawis" returning to the Western Sahara to vote in the referendum.

Truthfully, it is widely believed that these camps are filled with poor Moroccans who

have been paid to live in the Western Sahara and vote for integration when the time comes; people who probably have no intention of staying in the Western Sahara once their votes are cast. Not unlike the pre-colonial Moroccan Sultan's armies, comprised of poor conscripts who had no real interest in the royal campaign for power over the *bled es siha* (land of anarchy), but only in the fortunes and spoils promised by the monarch.

The road between El-Ayoun and Smara is at first flat, cutting through an endless landscape of sandless desert. I catch glimpses of the world's longest conveyor belt running parallel to the road for some distance, connecting the rich phosphate mines at Bou Craa with the port of El-Ayoun.

Just past half way to Smara, the road becomes more interesting, twisting, climbing and falling; the landscape more diversified, more hills of rock and sand. However, the scenery is still desolate, a moonscape. There is an intense emptiness in the region of the Saguia El-Hamra. I find it hard to believe people have lived in this place, outside of the city's shelter and far from the ocean's reassuring breeze.

It's even harder for me to believe that people have been living in exile for more than 25 years in a region like this, in tents and mud and brick shelters, with little more than hope and international aid to sustain them.

Few of us understood that there was an East Timor under our noses. The more I read about the Western Sahara dispute, the more I realized that I needed to see it with my own eyes.

Our taxi came upon Smara suddenly — first I see a military base, then a U.N. post, and then a large, tent city neighborhood like the one outside of El-Ayoun, separated from the center of town by a good distance. We pass the police check with no problem and cruise into the center of Smara.

I walk into the first café I see and order a coffee. The café is filled with gendarmes, soldiers, and well-dressed government functionaries — all watching me. Feeling uncomfortable, I quickly drink my coffee and ask for a hotel. The owner of the café points out a young and wiry Berber with a handsome face.

Upstairs, in the hotel, I feel relieved to be in the small dark office of the hotel owner, speaking his language. Explaining myself, I tell him about my work in Tafraoute and about my small tour of the Western Sahara. He listens while writing down all of my identification information, which surely will be in the hands of the national security in under an hour. He then shows me to my room where I make myself comfortable.

Unlike El-Ayoun, Smara feels like a Saharawi city. Although the military presence is saturating, Smara is not yet overrun with northern Moroccan civilians. Smara seems more alive. Every night there is a lively street market with unbelievably fresh vegetables and fruit. There are Saharawi men and women everywhere: women wearing bright colors, men in heavily embroidered, flowing blue and white robes.

I decide to leave Smara after spending only a day and a half there. There really is not much to do. I ask my hotel friend about guides who would take me to the desert but he doesn't know any. He said there are not enough tourists in Smara for a guide to open shop. Besides, he added, "You're crazy if you want to visit the desert. There are landmines everywhere." Bored with Smara, I cut my losses and get ready to leave.

The next morning I catch the earliest taxi to Tan Tan, which is another beautiful drive through endless expanses of desert. On the way out of Smara, a skinny gendarme asks for all of our national identity cards. He takes one look at mine and tells me to get out of the taxi. He points to his left, to a fatter gendarme sitting in the shade of their small shed. The fat one takes down my info, asking to see my passport as well. I try to smooth things over using my Moroccan Arabic, asking him how he is and blessing his parents. He isn't impressed; he just huffs and grunts, analyzing my passport's every detail.

I start to wonder if this is it. Am I caught?

But he simply hands back my identification with a curt *bon voyage*. ★

Further Reading

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For more information on the Saharawi refugee camps, *New Internationalist* (#297) and Human Rights Watch's "Keeping It Secret," both available on-line.

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www.akashicbooks.com

"American by birth, Israeli by association, and homeless by conscience." Thirty-four-year-old Joel Schalit is a poster child for the post-modern world.

However, the purpose of his new collection of essays, *Jerusalem Calling: A Homeless Conscience in a Post-Everything World* (Akashic Books), is not to flaunt the Punk Planet and Bad Subjects editor's leftist punk street cred, nor to wallow in the angst of his experience. Instead, *Jerusalem Calling* delivers thoughtful, passionate analyses of subjects including the religious fundamentalism of American cultural politics; the failures of the left; the inner conflicts of punk; and the past, present and future of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

As a "homeless conscience," Schalit presents his views as those of an outsider. However, what makes this book so compelling is that he grounds his arguments in his own engagements with history and the development of his personal beliefs. This approach not only lends contextual support and accessibility to his ideas but also underscores the timely conviction implicit throughout the book that, whatever countries or cultures we belong to, as citizens of this planet we are all connected by our humanity and implicated in what happens throughout the world. He argues that, "[w]hen there are no finer distinctions than 'us' versus 'them,' it becomes almost impossible to inspire meaningful action in a real world where each of us is both 'us' and 'them.'" Schalit's meditations on a recent journey to Israel are more refreshingly insightful than most any other current writing on the Middle East.

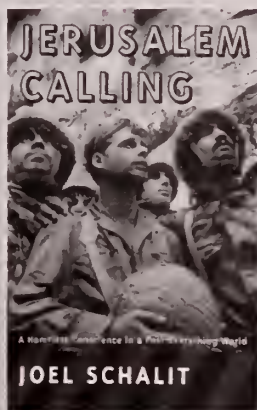
The only dissatisfying part of *Jerusalem Calling* is Schalit's essay on music. As he meanders through the rise and fall of the early '90s Seattle rock scene

and the crimes and punishments of working in the music industry, he eloquently articulates the dissonance between the DIY anarchy of punk in the '90s and the narcissism and conservative, capitalistic politics it often became mired in. However, Schalit also condemns the fact that our political culture is so bankrupt that we seek "new heroes to magically transform our frustrated political ambitions into useless cultural capital." Given that statement, the discussion of the crisis of faith that almost caused Schalit to stop making music doesn't quite work.

After seven years of culling Christian radio shows for song material, he began to fear he was becoming numb to the exploitation that he and his fellow Christal Methodists were trying to draw attention to. The inspiration that resolves his dilemma is to record a song using a speech by former Harlem congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. He concludes that he has "finally found a way to have my punk and play it, too." Has he really? Sure, he's found a more creatively and politically satisfying way to express himself, but for the rest of us, isn't it just more "useless cultural capital" to consume? or are we simply supposed to be inspired to find our own ways of merging our political convictions with our creative impulses? Is that enough?

Perhaps we shouldn't look to Schalit the musician to lead us to political nirvana. However, Schalit the essayist provokes so many important questions and brings so much insight to the table, it's hard not to ask for more.

-Susan Chenelle



THIRP REVIEW



The Hearing That Wasn't

Eco-Terrorism Hearing Sends Message to Activists

Joseph M. Smith

Based on the reports of friends and co-workers, I assumed congressional hearings were boring, tedious affairs that no one in their right mind would ever want to attend. Thus, when I found out I was going to the February 12 Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health hearing on "Eco-terrorism and Lawlessness on National Forests," I prepared myself for the worst.

Oh, how wrong I was.

The hearing was quite a show. From my spot in the back row I watched as, right before my eyes, the members of the subcommittee — normally stiff white guys in suits — were transformed into a bunch of snippy school yard bullies (in suits) by the stubborn obstructionism of ex-Earth Liberation Front (ELF) spokesperson, Craig Rosebraugh.

Rosebraugh, who was subpoenaed by subcommittee chair, Scott McInnis (R-CO), took the Fifth Amendment more than 50 times in response to a barrage of questions ranging from the accusatory "Are you a member of the Earth Liberation Front?" to the more pointless "Are you a citizen of the United States?"

Infuriated by his unwillingness to play along, the subcommittee members, mostly from districts within states whose economies are heavily dependent on resource extractive industries (timber, mining, and increasingly genetically engineered forestry and agricultural products), did everything they could to get him to talk. They tried embarrassing him in front of the packed room for taking the Fifth Amendment in response to a question about "whether or not he provided written testimony" to the subcommittee. (He did — a long-winded, 11-page, single-spaced diatribe about the federal government's inability to protect the environment from those who would profit from its exploitation — JMS). When that didn't work they insulted him for not having the courage stand up for his convictions in public. And finally, when all else failed, the legislators behind the dais tried, in full paternalistic tone, to talk some sense into Rosebraugh by reading the statements from convicted eco-felons who now regret the things they've done in the name of protecting the Earth.

Yet, aside from the snippy remarks of the normally reserved subcommittee members, the bursts of laughter that followed Rosebraugh's use of the Fifth to protect himself from the most harmless

of questions, and the blatant attempts by a few western lawmakers to paint radical environmentalists as the "American Al-Qaida," what made this hearing memorable were the questions *not* asked — chief among them being, what chance does a subpoenaed radical have at being treated fairly?

Before, during, and after Rosebraugh's testimony, McInnis could be heard saying that he hoped the hearings would provide a forum for the "honest and open discussion" about the issues at the heart of the radical environmentalist movement. That sure sounds nice. Understanding too. Yet, it pays to remember that Rep. Scott McInnis has been going to great lengths during the past few months to get eco-terrorism on the national agenda. For example, a few weeks after the tragic events of September 11, when other legislators were speaking before Congress about a getting America back on track after the attacks, McInnis spoke before Congress about the threat the ELF posed to America's security. Then, on October 31, McInnis sent letters to a host of national environmental organizations including such firebrands as the Sierra Club, the Environmental Defense Fund, and the League of Conservation Voters to get them to publicly disavow (and give them a chance to distance themselves from) the ELF. Now, it is not my contention that the ELF is a bunch of boy scouts. Since 1996, the organization has claimed responsibility for more than 600 acts of sabotage and caused over \$40 million in damage.

Nevertheless, given McInnis's interest in portraying environmental radicals in the worst light possible, how "open and honest" can one expect a hearing to be when the values of the subpoenaed are not only divergent, but downright antithetical to values of the man in charge? Under normal circumstances congressional hearings are the last place a radical who wants to slay the sacred cows of capitalism en route to safeguarding the environment will find a sympathetic ear. Under this set of circumstances it's impossible. Thus, is it any wonder Rosebraugh would cling so tightly to his right against self-incrimination? If you ask me, it's a crime that the subcommittee acted put out when their questions went unanswered.

Now, just for the record, I am no champion of the ELF. Like the naive black bloc, they are their own

worst enemy. Nevertheless, as I sat listening to the lawmakers take turns bludgeoning Rosebraugh with questions, barbs, and snide remarks, I was pleased that Rosebraugh kept his cool and didn't let the suits drag him into debate. If the subcommittee had successfully coaxed Rosebraugh into speaking his mind, he would have sold himself out by forfeiting his radical convictions for a chance to be "heard."

As is obvious from its communiques and other literature, the ELF is a revolutionary organization in that it seeks to overturn a central tenet of Western ideology: humanity's (self-proclaimed) right to benefit from the exploitation of the natural world. And as someone who subscribes to ELF's values, Rosebraugh's refusal to testify was demonstrative of the strength of his convictions — regardless of what the members of the subcommittee might think.

What may be more of a gray area, though, was Rosebraugh's repeated use of the Fifth Amendment to protect himself from self-incrimination. As one member of the subcommittee pointed out after asking Rosebraugh whether he believed in (the principles of) the Constitution — a question to which Rosebraugh pleaded the Fifth — "It's ironic that someone who doesn't believe in the constitution would rely so heavily on one of its protections."

Despite its source, this question has merit. Is it not hypocritical for self-proclaimed revolutionaries to rely on a state given protection? I don't have an answer, however, in this case, the point is moot. As McInnis explained, regardless of Rosebraugh's repeated use of the Fifth Amendment, he will have two opportunities to respond to the subcommittee's questions in writing. If he refuses, said McInnis, then he will be held in contempt of Congress.

This, of course, begs another, and in my view more important, question: Is it not hypocritical for the state to grant a right against self-incrimination and then force an individual to sacrifice it?

The answer is obvious. However, as this hearing so clearly demonstrated, the state's primary interest in self-preservation — seen here in its desire to protect itself against economic threat — far outweighs those of the individual. Granted, this is nothing new, but in this time of "you're either with us or against us" politics, *this* is something that radical activists ought to think twice about before they find themselves in a situation similar to that of Mr. Rosebraugh. ★

Antibalas Afrobeat Orchestra
Liberation Afrobeat Vol. 1
 Ninja Tune, 2001

"Antibalas is more than just a band. It aims to be a movement in an era where the pursuit of money and fame has ruined the souls and work of our fellow humans." - from the album liner notes



Born out of the musical and lyrical traditions of Nigeria's Fela Anikulapo Kuti, founder of the Afrobeat style, Antibalas is a New York-based band that is determined to keep Afrobeat alive while lending a keen critical eye toward present-day politics and culture. The sound that emerges from this determination is rife with Fela-inspired instrumentation - from the relentlessly driving percussion to the vivid horn blasts. On this album, the band's research into the ways of Afrobeat is evident as it weaves its way through lengthy songs - each displaying wonderful horn solos, funk-ridden bass lines, and ensemble call-and-response vocals. The album contains two live tracks as well, which inspire additional confidence in this outfit's ability to practice the Afrobeat style.

Also rooted in the tradition of Fela is Antibalas's lyrical content. While Fela dealt with corruption and mismanagement in Nigerian society, Antibalas widens the lens as it looks at corruption on a global scale. Taking on broad anti-capitalist themes, the lyrics demand that the listener examine closely the structure of power that exists in world societies. As the group blatantly says in the album liner notes: "We let dehumanizing, corrupt institutions like governments, armies, and banks dictate how we live and die... Try to see beyond that. Dare to be free!" With this, Antibalas defines itself as a musical collective that is fundamentally opposed to current economic and political tendencies toward globalization - a stance that Fela himself may very well have agreed with, were he still alive today. And so, Antibalas creates a new chapter in the history of Afrobeat - one that both musically and lyrically conjures the spirit of its founder.

-Hal Hixson

Azure Ray
November
 Saddle Creek Records, 2002
 www.saddle-creek.com

Those of you who have more than a couple issues of CLAMOR might recognize our (my) love affair with Saddle Creek Records. It's a strange love affair where I get more enjoyment from seeing them courted by other people than by myself. So I've been voyeuristically following the trail of articles, reviews and interviews about Saddle Creek and watching people fall in love with this label the way I did when I first heard Bright Eyes almost three years ago. Rarely have I not liked a release that they put out and when I do, it's kind of like getting over your lover's idiosyncracies and realizing that the quirks are what make you that much more entranced by them. But up to this point, Saddle Creek has been a boy's label-with most of the releases featuring brilliant, impassioned boys making beautiful music. It's long overdue and definitely fulfilling to hear the two entrancing women who are Azure Ray create captivatingly minimalist compositions with acoustic intimacy. Their haunting harmonies combine with cellos, piano, guitar and bowed bass to create an enveloping beauty not unlike some of the darker Suzanne Vega songs and Julee Cruise (from Twin Peaks' soundtracks). The subterranean bass lines of "I Will Do These Things" will literally slow your heart rate to synch with the song while you become completely aware of your physical connection to the music. This is a rare thing and definitely something to be sought out and cherished.

-Jason Kucsma



Bad Religion
Process of Belief
 Epitaph Records, 2002
 www.epitaph.com

The Process of Belief the newest addition to the punk-rock dynasty that is Bad Religion, marks two changes for the band. First, with this album Brett Gurewitz, lead guitarist and owner of Epitaph records, returns to the fold. Then the band returned to Epitaph after six years of making poorly received and critically substandard records on Atlantic. Many fans saw these bold moves as a return to the Bad Religion of old.

They were right.

Gurewitz, or Mr. Brett, as he is known, left the band in 1994 after the release of their first Atlantic record, *Stranger than Fiction*. After battling drug addiction and eventually landing in jail, Gurewitz managed to pull himself back together and get in touch with his old band mates.

The Process of Belief contains 14 songs, the best of which exemplify what made Bad Religion great in the past. "Destined for Nothing" and "Materialist" contain the anti-religious sentiment that permeated "I Want to Conquer the World" and "American Jesus." The harmonies in "Broken" hearken back to the days of "Infected" and "21st Century Digital Boy," while the social angst in "Fuck Armageddon, This Is Hell" is evident in "The Defense." Brett's guitars are immediately recognizable, his presence is felt on every Bad Religion album he plays on and missed where he doesn't. Of course, some critics will say this is just the same old routine, buzz-saw riffs and speed. But, hey, it's punk rock. What do you want, a chamber choir?

The lyrics are at once poetic and depressing. Some punk rock in empowering with a message that says "the world sucks, so change it." Bad Religion's message is more like "The world sucks, so sit back and watch the decline because it's all going to be over soon anyway." In "Broken," lead singer Greg Gaffin chants with his raspy voice; "Oh, yeah, I know I'm not broken/ A little cracked, but still I'm not broken/ I wanna laugh, but I think that I'm choking on reality." On religion, Gaffin writes "The process of belief is an elixir for the weak/ I must admit at times that I indulge it on the sneak."

Although the band is no stranger to political activism, its subject has never been so specific as in "Kyoto Now," a song that protests President Bush's failure to sign the Kyoto Accords. Although Gaffin knows that the song may not be taken seriously ("You might not think it matters, but what if you are wrong/ You might not think there's any wisdom in a fucked-up punk rock song"), he pleads "Don't allow this mythologic hopeful monster to exact its price/Kyoto now! We can't do nothing and think someone else will make it right."

But with all the hoopla about BR's return to its roots, there are many songs which rely on the same formula as "New America" or "No Substance," such as "Sorrow" or the vague "The Lie." And the harmonies that Bad Religion has been known and loved for over the years fall flat on songs like "Epiphany."

There are some groundbreaking ideas. In fact, I think "The Defense" has the first punk-rock sitar I've ever heard. There is also a Pink Floyd-esque break in the middle of "Bored and Extremely Dangerous," complete with spoken lyrics and alarm clocks that adds a touch to punk rarely seen since the days of Crass.

The most amazing aspect of the album is that, after all these years, Bad Religion seems to be able to capture the essence of its time within a few short songs. These songs prove that the band still has its finger on the pulse of youth culture. Bad Religion is back in form, and they still know what to say, what to do. Hopefully, after years of lackluster albums and themes, people will still be listening.

-Danny McCaslin



Desaparecidos
Read Music, Speak Spanish
 Saddle Creek Records, 2002
 www.saddle-creek.com

This new project from Saddle Creek features Bright Eyes' Conor Oberst and friends in a setting that will be somewhat new to the thousands of people who have been captivated by Bright Eyes in the last couple of years. Desaparecidos is a rock and roll reflection on life, progress and success in the vacuum of Omaha, Nebraska, USA. The energy and momentum of the songs almost disguise the fact that these songs are about some of the most debilitating elements of American culture. Songs about rampant development for development's sake, middle-age regret and resentment, and commercial-driven nationalism have the potential to come off as whiny or incomplete critiques. However, Desaparecidos manage to explore these issues from a first person perspective that is as sincere as it is frustrated and impassioned as it is disaffected. I hesitate to mention that this CD didn't blow me away as much as I hoped it would have, but each additional listen to "Read Music, Speak Spanish" find me a little more engaged and liking what I hear even more. You should try it on for yourself.

-Jason Kucsma

The Devil Is Electric
"I've never trusted a Revolutionary that was afraid to Dance."
 Plan-it-X Records
 www.plan-it-x.com

The Devil Is Electric are like the first time you ever drove, like, 115 in your parents' car and didn't crash (and were only 14!)... Or listening to Springsteen shout "it ain't no sin to be glad you're alive," from "Badlands" (live, no less!), or eating Pad Thai from Kai Kai Kai at Tompkins Square, or not ever having your grandparents die, or getting chased by security at Wal-Mart without getting caught, or... well, I could go on, but repetition is already like the most cliché record-reviewing tool in existence and I've wasted a whole paragraph using it.

TDIE run Plan-it-X (whose motto - "if it ain't cheap, it ain't punk" - is exemplified by their 5 dollar CD prices). In fact, I was gonna save half the space in this review for This Bike is a Pipe Bomb, their label-mates - without whom I would never have seen TDIE play in the first place - but they haven't released their new album yet, so I figured I would simply extol the virtues of the whole label altogether.

Anyways... the band: The Devil Is Electric are three decent, honest people (I gather, from speaking to them briefly) whose exuberance and lust for life (despite singer Chris's professed hatred of "just about everything") translates into totally inspiring music. They are closer to capturing what D. Boon meant when he sang, "we'd go drink and pogo" than any other band I can think of.

-gibby peach

Liars
They Threw Us All In a Trench and Stuck a Monument On Top
 Gern Blandsten

Dissonant guitars, aggressive beats, lo-fi electronics, and disaffected vocals all add up to one thing in my book: No-Wave. This is the best kind of post-punk, think PIL on PCP or Sonic Youth on crack. Liars remind me a bit of early Cop Shoot



Cop, Barkmarket and a personal favorite of the mid-nineties NYC club scene The Spitters.

Though most of the aforementioned bands are since defunct, there is a new wave of no-wave cropping up these days. I put Liars into the same category as NYC contemporaries Flux Information Sciences and mid-western genre-benders Stylex and (more broadly) the Faint. All the energy of first class punk-rock is here, but the chaos is carefully ordered. It's aggressive, but not really angry. Liars don't want to kick your ass, but they probably wouldn't brake if they saw you crossing the street in front of them.

I've heard that they are an amazing live act, and indeed this kind of music does translate better at high volume in a small club where you can feel the bass loosening your large intestine and the feedback crushing your temples. Liars are a full-on touring band though, so keep an eye on the Gern Blandsten website for a live date near you. In the meantime *They Threw Us All In A Trench...* will have to suffice. Recommended.

-David Stokamer

SAGE FRANCIS

Personal Journals
Anticon
www.anticon.com

So I'm handed the 12" single of Sage Francis *Climb Trees* to review. I get home and pop it into the hi-fi and my jaw drops. I turn it up and run to my computer. I'm determined to hear more. I want to review everything Sage has ever performed. But FUCK?! His shit isn't available anywhere. I look and look through all the underground hip-hop sites hoping to find a copy of something he's done, but it all seems to be all out of print. So I give up and forget about Sage for a minute.

Couple weeks later I am handed an advance copy of *Personal Journals* and I'm like AWWWW SHIT!!! WHAT LUCK!! And run home to slide it into my hi-fi. My jaw drops again, I sit down, I listen, and I can't turn it off.

Three weeks later and im still rockin *Personal Journals*.

With Sage, he rhymes like a beat poet, slam poet AND old schooler all in one. He is straight edge and vegetarian, and he disses all who would diss him. The beats he rhymes over are dope, but a little dirty and raw.

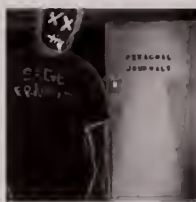
Personal Journals 2nd track has the line "different like a playtapis, analytical analyst, by the end of this record I'll make sure all of y'all know who Sage Francis is" and you DO know. He talks about love, family, self mutilation, alcohol/drug abuse, the fucked up hip hop industry and everything in between.

This record isn't for the impatient. It takes time to get into it. You have to want to hear what he has to say. But luckily for those clueless to him (like myself) prior to this album he lays it all out on the table. You end up listening to the songs again and again trying to memorize all his words (at least I did). His first cut released, *Climb Trees* is amazing. A little less personal, a little more in your face, and a perfect intro to his style while not alienating.

As is the case for most underground cats, MP3s and mix tapes are the ways to get songs out to the masses. But Sage deserves more than that. He's been rated amongst the top 50-100 in numerous magazines.. (URB and SPIN to name a couple)

He deserves you going to your favorite small local records store or website and BUYING *Personal Journals*. You deserve it too. This guy needs to be given a bigger platform, because.. well, he is absolutely amazing! this album is addictive. I've been listening to it at least once a day, sometimes many more..

-Dustin Amery Hosteller



Telefon Tel Aviv
Fahrenheit Fair Enough
Hefty Records
www.heftyrecords.com

Telefon Tel Aviv, Fahrenheit Fair Enough, say it out loud. There's a pleasingly rhythmic quality to this band's name and debut album title wouldn't you say? I would, and pleasingly quality rhythms are the order of the day for Chicago based duo Joshua Eustis and Charles Cooper collectively known as Telefon Tel Aviv. On this, their debut long player for Chi-town's Hefty records, Cooper and Eustis establish themselves as a force to be reckoned with in the world of down-tempo IDM (intelligent dance music). Think Tortoise meets *Anvil Vapre era* Autechre, and no, the comparison is not hyperbolic in the least, this record is that good.

Telefon Tel Aviv 's sound is a perfect balance of arhythmic chirps and clicks, solid beats and smooth analog sounds. Plenty of mellow Rhodes, shimmering guitars and synths hold the mood while the glitchy sounds of malfunctioning machines dance above sparse beats and rolling bass lines. This is the combination of elements that started my obsession with Autechre in the first place (a combination the British act has since abandoned in favor of high-tech wankery), and I daresay TTA does it just as well if not better.

This is make-out music for 2010, the soundtrack to long division in a hot bath. I'm talking about some driving-through-the-dessert-in-a-rainstorm-at-night type shit. Tell a Friend.

-David Stokamer

Yagya
Rhythm of Snow
Force Inc.
www.force-inc.net

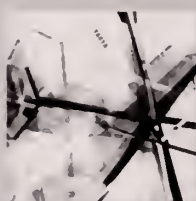
When I think of Iceland I think of, well, ice (and vodka and Bjork of course). A techno scene in Iceland? Well I guess it does get pretty cold over there, and as long as one must spend all that time indoors one might as well produce some top-notch deep-house cuts, no? Yagya steps to the plate with some incredibly soothing synth sweeps washing over sparse beats. UK deep-house heroes Swayzak and Detroit minimalist Richie Hawtin come to mind as quick points of reference.

Laying atmospheric organic sounds over 4/4 kicks can be a risky proposition, the potential is there for a snooze and/or cheez-fest but Yagya manages to avoid the cliches on *Rhythm of Snow* with much aplomb and many quality chill-out tracks. Songs that start out as ambient loops build slowly and methodically into thick soundscapes moved ever forward by minimal beats. The end result is a little bit dubby, a little bit housey, just barely techy, and full-on chilly.

When you're too fucked up to dance, but not ready to pass out. If it's not a night out 'till it's light out and you've yet to see the sun. Heck, when it's plain old time to relax, its Yagya time baby Yeah.

If you check out only one Icelandic techno album this year...

-David Stokamer



Various Artists
I Giant Leap
Palm Pictures, 2001
www.IGiantLeap.tv

A piece of work that gives new definition to the concept of collaboration, *I Giant Leap* is a combination of film and music that was born out of the partnership of creative visionaries Jamie Catto and Duncan Bridgeman. The project enlists artists of varied backgrounds to create a unique and engaging aural and visual landscape that is meant to promote the theme of "unity in diversity" - a phrase that is defined by the creators as - "the assertion that regardless of one's circumstances and experience, our similarities vastly outweigh our differences." This is quite a general and challenging premise indeed, but one that *I Giant Leap* is able to examine quite well, thanks in great part to the caliber of the artists who participated in its creation. The list of contributing artists is touted by the creators as containing "some of the most creative minds of our generation," and this is truly what is delivered. Kurt Vonnegut, Tom Robbins, Brian Eno, Baaba Maal, Michael Stipe, Mahotella Queens, U Shrinvas, Ulali, the Soweto String Quartet, and many others all feed bits and pieces into this vast tapestry of sound and image - a collage that continually challenges perspective and re-invents itself.

Armed with only a laptop and a digital camera, Catto and Bridgeman set out on a six-month journey across the globe, seeking out artists from over 20 countries to join their collective. What is particularly new and exciting about *I Giant Leap* is that it vividly shows the impact that technology can have on the creative process. Because they were not limited by the constrictions of a traditional music studio - they didn't even need on-site electricity to operate - Catto and Bridgeman were able to go to extremely remote regions of the world to compile the music that eventually became the final piece. And because of the complete mobility of their studio, they were able, for example, to let a vocalist in Senegal hear the rhythms that a drummer in India recorded only days before. Thus, *I Giant Leap* was able to present the artists involved with a new process of collaboration - one that literally bridged thousands of miles of distance without sacrificing the quality or the immediacy of the music created.

One of the most compelling tracks on the disc is "Braided Hair" - a song that combines the vocal stylings of Speech (from Arrested Development) with those of Neneh Cherry to address themes of personal history and global unity. The result is a smooth number built around delicate guitar loops interwoven with near-acapella chorus breaks. On "The Way You Dream," Michael Stipe teams with Indipop star Asha Bhosle in a slow, wandering musical journey through faith and memory. Here, Stipe's vocals are soft and rough providing a subtle juxtaposition to Bhosle's vocal swells. Two tracks on the disc, "Dunya Salam" and "Bushes" feature Baaba Maal. The first of these gives Maal freedom to explore his trademark vocal range over a lush bed of electronic ambience. "Bushes," in turn, begins with subtle sonic textures, but then grows into a steady grove mixed with small forays into electronic cacophony - a musical blend that allows Maal to move even further into his vocal outer limits.

As a whole, *I Giant Leap* holds together as a substantive statement on the beauty of diversity and the power of unity. Musically and technologically, it is a great achievement toward the future of cross-cultural and long-distance collaboration. Thematically, it takes on concepts and ideas that are both rich in their history and complex in their development. Most importantly though, *I Giant Leap* shows that collaboration not only benefits its direct participants, but also its witnesses

-Hal Hixon

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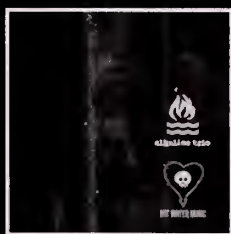


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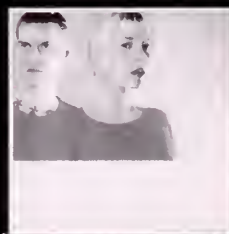
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